

**House Bill 1515 Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for
Service Members and Veterans – Establishment**
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 11, 2020
Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 1515.

HB 1515 would establish a Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Health to support local behavioral health programs for service members, veterans, and their families.

Statistics related to the prevalence of mental health disorders among U.S. veterans are startling. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Approximately 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for mental health conditions seek it, but only half who receive treatment receive adequate care.

Of particular concern is the high rate of veteran suicide:

- Veterans account for 18 percent of all suicide deaths among U.S. adults
- On average, one U.S. veteran dies by suicide nearly every hour
- Veteran suicides in Maryland average over 100 per year (308 total from 2015-2017)

In 2018, it was projected that 380,000 veterans would call Maryland home¹, and in 2017, a total of 47,484 active duty serviceman and reserve members were reported to reside in Maryland². It is essential that we ensure these individuals and their families have access to behavioral health services as needed.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 1515 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://veterans.maryland.gov/2013-maryland-veteran-population-map/>

² <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/public-workforce-salaries/military-civilian-active-duty-employee-workforce-numbers-by-state.html>