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**House Bill 1558 – Residential Treatment Centers Facilities – Sexual Abuse and Harassment Reporting and Prevention**

Judiciary Committee

March 10, 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 1558.

HB 1558 expands requirements around the reporting of sexual abuse and harassment in certain facilities. It defines 'covered entities' as a state facility, a forensic residential center, or a residential treatment center (RTC) for children; and it requires reports of abuse in those facilities to be filed with the Behavioral Health Administration, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Health Care Quality and Disability Rights Maryland.

Under current regulations, abuse and harassment reporting laws do not apply to all RTCs. HB 1558 would ensure quick reporting to a range of entities that can ensure an appropriate follow-up and response from the facility when abuse occurs. Such a response may include policy revisions, improved staff training, and ensuring that culpable staff are terminated and/or prosecuted, as appropriate.

Many children in RTCs are dealing with severe emotional and behavioral health problems. These youth deserve a safe, supervised treatment environment free from trauma and abuse. Sexually abused children are at an increased risk for mental health problems throughout their life. Trauma during these formative years places children at a greater risk for subsequent psychological problems, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, poor self-esteem, dissociative and anxiety disorders. Long term negative effects on development leading to repeated or additional victimization in adulthood are also associated with child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse against vulnerable children should not go unreported because it leads to delayed support for the victim and their families.

HB 1558 will ensure that sexual abuse and harassment in state facilities is reported to the appropriate entities in a timely manner. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

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