



## **FAVORABLE**

## **TESTIMONY**

### **Senate Bill 637 Health and Health Insurance - Behavioral Health Services - Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)**

Finance Committee

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**by**

**JB Moore**

**Executive Director**

Good Afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee.

On behalf of Prince George's County Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness I extend gratitude for the opportunity support Senate Bill 637 – a bill that includes sorely needed reforms and enhancements to meet the increasing demand for mental health and substance use services in the State of Maryland.

I am JB Moore, Executive Director for NAMI Prince George's County, and family member and guardian of a loved one living with a serious mental illness. I am also a Gulf War Veteran.

The need for quality mental health and substance use care has never been higher.

We applaud Senator Malcolm Augustine's dedicated efforts to address critical issues surrounding mental health care, for sponsoring this important legislation, and for his wholehearted support for NAMI Prince George's County.

Mental health conditions are common and affect more than 781,000 people in our state.

Yet, an estimated 252,000 adults in Maryland did not receive needed mental health care in the last year and more than 1 million people in Maryland live in a community that does not have enough mental health professionals.

One in four individuals with a serious mental illness will be arrested during their lives.

Maryland hospitals saw more than 417,000 visits for behavioral health crises in 2019.

According to federal data, in Prince George's County alone, approximately 20,000 individuals will require crisis services annually.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 57% of those who need treatment do not receive mental health services; and up to 90% of adults with both mental health and behavioral health (co-occurring) disorders do not receive treatment (SAMHSA 2019).

**SB 637 can help!** This sweeping legislation is the blueprint for the future of Maryland's mental health care delivery system. It requires significant state investment to vastly increase community access in every county across the state.

The expansion of Maryland's network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics would ensure access to integrated, evidence-based addiction and mental health services, including 24/7 crisis response and medication-assisted treatment for addiction.

Prince Georgians would benefit by having access to at least one Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) by 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA. (2020). National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>

Peers are essential to the behavioral health workforce. Peer-led support services and programs lead to positive outcomes, both in acute treatment episodes and long-term recovery supports.

At its core, the peer support ‘approach’ assumes that people who have similar experience can relate and can consequently offer more authentic empathy and validation

As a mental health intervention and recovery model, peer support has proven to

- Decrease hospital admission rates
- Decrease hospital re-admission rates
- Increase hospital discharge rates

To ensure equal access to these services, peer services should be reimbursed for people with public or private insurance. For people with no insurance, and for services not appropriate for health insurance reimbursement, grant funds are currently available and must increase to meet a growing need.

Guaranteed yearly funding for Maryland’s community peer support network, and the requirement for Medicaid and other health insurers to reimburse for services performed in clinical settings by certified peer recovery specialists would help strengthen the behavioral health workforce.

Children and youth with mental health and substance use needs have fewer treatment options than adults. Wraparound services for youth with intensive behavioral health needs are simply not available to many families. Appropriate home- and community-based supports for Black and brown youth are particularly limited.

NAMI Prince George’s County is grateful for the opportunity to assist the Prince George’s County Health Department implement a SAMHSA funded, 4-year initiative aimed at transforming the way mental health, educational and other supportive services are delivered for high-risk youth ages 16 -21 transitioning into adulthood.

Youth with intensive behavioral health needs would benefit from improved and increased high-fidelity, wraparound services that keep youth in their homes and out of hospitals.

Finally, NAMI Maryland advocates for help, not handcuffs and believes that mental health emergencies deserve a mental health response. The criminalization of mental illness must stop, and diverting justice involved individuals to a health care setting is critical to supporting this work.

NAMI Prince George's County is currently supporting Prince George's County's efforts to expand the county's crisis infrastructure through a significant Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) Regional Partnership Catalyst Grant Program over a five-year period.

The Prince George's Health Department is working with community hospitals to building the foundation needed to sustainably support the population health goals of the Total Cost of Care (TCOC) Model as they relate to behavioral health crisis services; and safely prevent unnecessary emergency room visits and hospitalizations for a large population of people residing in Prince George's County.

However, the Regional Partnership Catalyst Program is a *temporary* funding mechanism intended to encourage eligible hospitals to work together with community partners on building important foundations to improve population health.

And, despite the noteworthy efforts of the County and its strategic hospital and community partners – *sustainability* of these expansion efforts will require reliable reimbursement beyond the current grant terms.

Medicaid and private insurance companies must be required to subsidize the cost of these crisis services – to include

- Crisis Call Centers
- Mobile Crisis Team Expansion
- Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Services

Substance use and mental health issues have a significant impact on people, families, communities, and society.

When people don't receive the mental health care they need and deserve, their conditions often worsen and have significant impacts on the individual, their family, and their community.

Furthermore, gaps in service drive inequality.

It is for these reasons that SB 637 is important to my family, Prince George's County families and thousands of other families across that state of Maryland.

In closing, the demand for behavioral health care is at an all-time high. The enhancements in this bill are needed now more than ever. **NAMI Prince George's County urges this committee to pass SB 637 – now!**

Thank you for affording me this opportunity to testify before you today.

## **CONTACT**

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