

February 15, 2023

Written Support of HB0488

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, Ways and Means
House Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members

The Montgomery County Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is writing in support of HB0488 “Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program-Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools.”

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. A key service of NAMI is to build communities of peers to provide support, education, and advocacy for all affected by mental illness.

The depth of the behavioral health workforce crisis in Maryland cannot be overstated. These shortages can lead to long wait-times for services which, as in the tragic [case of Zachary Chafos](#), can have lethal consequences.

Following are some current impacts within our county related to the behavioral health workforce shortage:

- **Wait Lists** – The county’s Child and Adolescent and Adult Mental Health Outpatient Clinics which serve as the County’s safety nets for uninsured residents with behavioral health needs have indicated that they have long wait lists (child and adolescent services) or turn individuals away with unmet needs (adult services).
- **Unfilled Positions** – Both our crisis center and 9-8-8 provider report difficulties in filling vacancies for critical front-line services.
- **Burnout** – Low wages and stressful work environments have pushed providers into private practice or deciding to leave for a different field.
- **Recruiting Diverse Providers** – As a majority-minority county, County providers struggle to identify and recruit professionals that are reflective of underserved populations and/or have bilingual capabilities.

Addressing the behavioral health workforce shortage requires significant investment and cannot be done in a piecemeal manner. Bill HB0488 which expands opportunities for loan forgiveness will allow



Montgomery County

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individuals with school tuition burden – many of who are from historically marginalize communities – to enter the workforce which in turn helps to build a robust and quality behavioral system of care.

We strongly urge you to issue a favorable report for this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie J. Rosen". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Stephanie Rosen
Executive Director
NAMI Montgomery County

Hope starts here.