



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

March 7, 2024

Senate Bill 0988: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Self-Directed Mental Health Services - Pilot Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0988: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Self-Directed Mental Health Services - Pilot Program.

Mental illness is a chronic condition that many Maryland residents face in their lifetime. Despite increasing resources to encourage treatment and mental health management, residents continue to go untreated and such resources are underutilized. According to the data reported by the National Alliance on Mental Health, in February of 2021, 39% of Marylanders suffered symptoms of anxiety and depression, and yet 31.3% were unable to receive treatment (n.d.). There are many reasons as to why people deny seeking out mental health services, some of which include cost, lack of knowledge on available resources, lack of confidence, and fear of judgement caused by the current stigma. When an individual feels out of control over their health or does not have enough information to process new prognostics, it can be extremely discouraging to take action. Mental illness does not affect everyone equally, and individually based illnesses require individualized treatment. With these barriers in mind, self-directed service programs have been gradually used as models for mental health care programs and have proven to address these concerns. Self-guided models allow the individual to make decisions about their care and recovery while also receiving supplemental support when needed to make an informed decision. The decisions made in mental health recovery heavily revolve around the individual's desire for treatment and compliance. To aid in improving retention of treatment and successful recovery, the individual needs to be involved in each step and needs to feel heard. Self-guided programs empower participants and motivates them to take control of their health by making decisions based on their personal volition (Human Services Research Institute, n.d.). Such empowerment can allow the individual to become a contributing member of society. The inclusion of the individual in treatment facilitates trust between the participant and provider, encouraging the participant to be open to further treatment. If the budget allows the passing of SB0988, a self-directed pilot study focusing around mental-health treatment would bring invaluable insight for mental and public health professionals as we continue to support Maryland residents suffering from mental illness.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
Jonathan Dayton, MS, NREMT, CNE, Executive Director
jdayton@mdruralhealth.org*

National Alliance of Mental Illness Maryland. (n.d.). Mental health in Maryland.

<https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/MarylandStateFactSheet.pdf>

Human Services Research Institute. (n.d.). *The fundamentals – An overview.*

<https://www.mentalhealthselfdirection.org/fundamentals#:~:text=What%20is%20Self%2DDirection%3F,goals%20for%20recovery%20and%20independence>.