

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**To:** Members of the Finance Committee in the Maryland Senate

**From:** Dr. Samantha Fuld, DSW, MSW, LCSW-C, Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Maryland School of Social Work.

**Re:** Support for SB0988: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Self-Directed Mental Health Services - Pilot Program

**Position: Favorable**

I am a proud resident of Maryland (District 46). I am also licensed as a Clinical Social Worker in Maryland and am a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. In these professional roles I have worked alongside hundreds of individuals and families with mental health disabilities and have contributed to the clinically focused education of hundreds of social workers in Maryland. Please note that in this testimony I am speaking as an individual and NOT on behalf of my employer.

In the realm of clinical supports, services, and treatment, we know that a sense of safety, autonomy, and choice are paramount to successful healing. These are key elements of the evidence-based [Trauma-Informed Care](#) (TIC) model created by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2014. These principles include safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and [attention to] cultural, historical, and gender issues. These principles have been widely adopted as best practice in the mental and behavioral health realm, including by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [as part of their public health strategy](#) and by the City of Baltimore through the [Elijah Cummings Healing City Act](#).

The proposed Self-Directed Mental Health Services Pilot aligns well with these principles in its efforts to support a person in guiding their own treatment decisions with specific directives for empowerment and choice in the care, resources, and services they receive. No one improves by force and loss of control. This approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of Marylanders is in line with best practices and is likely to have significantly better and longer lasting positive outcomes than the proposed Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program (HB 576/SB 453) which directly counters what we know about an effective clinical treatment process.

I urge you to support the approval and implementation of this pilot, which provides an opportunity for Maryland to offer supportive, effective, trauma-informed mental health services and concrete resources that emphasize empowerment, voice, and choice in the process.

Respectfully,

Dr. Samantha Fuld, DSW, MSW, LCSW-C

