

March 13, 2024

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and distinguished members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

1 in 4 children in the U.S. experience maltreatment. Unfortunately, many abused children experience negative physical, mental, and social outcomes. Research shows that **1 in 6** youth/adolescents will experience a mental health condition in any given time.¹ Additionally, **50%** of all lifetime mental health conditions begin before the age of 14 and 75% start before the age of 24.²

However, identifying warning signs or symptoms and seeking treatment early can make a difference in reducing the impact of a mental health condition. NAMI MD believes that, at the earliest possible time in their lives, all children and adolescents with serious mental illnesses deserve to be diagnosed, appropriately treated, and offered the services necessary to achieve and maintain their recovery. Children need to be able to talk with supportive adults.

NAMI MD calls for strong interagency collaboration between all child- and family-serving agencies, including state and local mental health systems; public and private schools; child welfare systems; and juvenile justice systems. By requiring child advocacy centers to report the names and license numbers of behavioral health care providers providing services in the center and the scope of those health care services, we are crafting standards to ensure that our State's most vulnerable children are in good hands and that there is a mechanism for investigation should there need to be one.

We believe that children and adolescents with mental illnesses have the right and must be offered the opportunity to thrive in nurturing environments. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

¹ [US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children | Psychiatry and Behavioral Health | JAMA Pediatrics | JAMA Network](#)

² [Age of onset of mental disorders: A review of recent literature - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)