



February 28, 2024

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 829 - Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health First Aid Training

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 829 - Public Health - Service Sector Employees - Mental Health First Aid Training. This bill would increase access to mental health first aid training among individuals who frequently interact with the public. Promoting such training would decrease stigma related to mental health concerns and help members of the public assist others who are experiencing mental health distress.

Mental Health First Aid is an effective early intervention public education program that was first brought to the United States in 2008 by the National Council on Mental Well-Being, the Maryland Department of Health, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health. This training framework teaches adults how to recognize the signs and symptoms that suggest a potential mental health challenge, how to listen nonjudgmentally and give reassurance to a person who may be experiencing a mental health challenge, and how to refer a person to appropriate professional support and services. BHSB has been providing this training to communities in Baltimore City for several years and has found it to be impactful.

The state could make significant strides in reducing mental health stigma and supporting individuals in crisis by making this training available to service sector employees. These professionals routinely interact with the public and can help to support an individual in distress if given the appropriate tools and training. The state should endeavor to make mental health first aid training widely available to these individuals to the extent that budgetary resources allow.

Mental health first aid training is an effective way to help individuals support those who are experiencing mental health concerns. **BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB 829.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142