



**Montgomery County Federation of Families for
Children's Mental Health, Inc.**

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HB 408 Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees – Membership

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 14, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

I am Celia Serkin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. (MC Federation of Families), a family peer support organization serving diverse families in Montgomery County who have children, youth, and/or young adults with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring challenges. Our Certified Family Peer Specialists are parents who have raised or are currently raising children with mental health, substance use, and/or co-occurring challenges. I am a Montgomery County resident. I have two children, now adults. My son has severe depression. My daughter has co-occurring challenges.

MC Federation of Families is pleased to support **HB 408 Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees – Membership.**

HB 408 alters the membership of a county's mental health advisory committee by including an individual with experience with mental health care for veterans or individuals serving in the military on the list of groups from which individuals may be appointed to the committee by the governing body of the county.

MHAC supports HB 408 because it is critically important that County Mental Health Advisory Committees in Maryland include an individual with experience with mental health care for veterans and individuals serving in the military to expand their military and veterans' cultural competency. Combat and deployments are known to be associated with increased risks for mental health conditions. General military service can also give rise to challenges. The most widely publicized mental health challenges veterans and service members encounter are posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Moreover, suicide, traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance use disorder (SUD), and interpersonal violence can be equally detrimental in these populations. Veterans and individuals serving in the military who have mental health challenges and their families need access to different resources and supports. In her article *Supporting the Behavioral Health Needs of Our Nation's Veterans*, dated November 8, 2022, Stacey Owens, M.S.W., LCSW-C, Military and Veterans Affairs Liaison, Center for Mental Health Services, states:

Data also suggests that approximately half of those who recently separated from military service may not immediately connect with available resources, benefits, and services. Without support, more complex behavioral health concerns might emerge. In 2020, approximately 5.2 million Veterans experienced a behavioral health condition. More telling are the numbers of Veterans who were not engaged in treatment; more than half of Veterans with a mental illness did not receive treatment within the past year. Additionally, more than 90 percent of those experiencing a substance use

disorder did not receive treatment. This data highlights that our friends, family, and community members may be suffering in silence and that barriers to care exist, including stigma.

Behavioral health is essential to overall health, and we all have a role in ensuring that service members, Veterans and their families are prepared for their next steps in life as they transition. <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/supporting-behavioral-health-needs-our-nations-veterans>

MC Federation of Families urges this committee to pass HB 408.