



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 12, 2024

To: The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 408- Mental Health Law - County Mental Health Advisory Committees - Membership

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 408. Maryland hospitals support the inclusion of mental health professionals as eligible members of each county's mental health advisory committee.

Each year more patients come to hospitals with mental health-related conditions. In 2023, Kaiser Family Foundation found 27% of adults in Maryland identified with anxiety or depressive order symptoms.¹ Veterans were among the patients most affected by behavioral health challenges. About 5.2 million veterans nationwide experienced a behavioral health condition, according to a 2020 SAMHSA study.² It is essential that veterans and military personnel have mental health providers with expertise in treating and advocating on behalf of this population.

HB 408 would require providers with experience in mental health care for veterans or individuals serving in the military eligible to serve on the mental health advisory committee. Given the nuances in behavioral health, veteran and active military personnel need equitable representation. By adding mental health experts with the requisite experience to county health committees, HB 408 gives military members a separate voice to address behavioral health issues that affect this vulnerable population.

Additionally, the ongoing behavioral health care crisis in Maryland contributes to ED length of stay and hospital discharge challenges. When patients have access to these services in primary care settings, they can get the help they need at the onset of behavioral health conditions and stay out of crisis. County health committees are an important part of the continuum of care for patients whose experiences may be inadvertently overlooked. Through advocacy and policy reforms, military behavioral health patients can obtain necessary upstream care—resulting in better health outcomes for all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we request a *favorable* report on HB 408.

¹ [Mental Health and Substance Use State Fact Sheets: Maryland | KFF](#)

² [Supporting the Behavioral Health Needs of Our Nation's Veterans | SAMHSA](#)



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