



February 28, 2024

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

HB 980 - Public Health - Opioid Restitution Advisory Council and Fund - Revisions

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 980 - Public Health - Opioid Restitution Advisory Council and Fund - Revisions. This bill would provide transparency in the funding decisions made related to the Opioid Restitution Fund (ORF) and establish an important set aside for community-based recovery organizations.

The ORF is an important funding source critical to combatting the opioid epidemic in Maryland. These dollars must be allocated strategically to maximize their impact and be responsive to community needs. The General Assembly established the ORF Advisory Council to make recommendations on funding allocations and provide a forum for community and stakeholder feedback. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is not required to follow ORF Advisory Council recommendations but should consider them. HB 980 would add some required timelines and explanations for the allocation decisions made by MDH to ensure transparency in how these important dollars are being used.

The bill would also allocate 25% of ORF dollars to community-based recovery organizations. These programs provide non-clinical services and support led by members of the local recovery and peer community. These programs prioritize critical social support, case management, and peer services that are not provided in traditional treatment settings. These recovery programs operate on small budgets and do not have a steady source of funding. BHSB funds these programs at about \$2 million per year from grant dollars passed through from MDH, but this funding is not secure. Allocating a portion of the ORF to these critical services would make sure these programs have the resources needed to serve their communities and become stronger and more effective.

Community priorities, including recovery support, must be considered for funding through the ORF.
BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB 980.

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