February 22, 2024

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Judicial Proceedings 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.

SB636 would establish a Commission to study the ability of the Department of Juvenile Services to Provide Effective Social Services to Juvenile Offenders. The Commission is to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the practices of DJS related to treatment programs and mental health services, among other services provided to juvenile offenders.

One of NAMI MD's main goals is to ensure that people get help early. Early intervention and treatment save lives. Since 50% of all mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24, it is critical that we promote greater awareness and early identification of mental health conditions in youth. We know that children and youth with mental illness need more support in Maryland.

70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health condition Youth in detention are 10x more likely to suffer from psychosis than youth in the community. Many individuals with mental health conditions become justice-involve due to lack of adequate community mental health services—1 in 4 individuals with serious mental illness will be arrested in their lives.

Maryland youth deserve better—they deserve effective, comprehensive systems of care. By establishing a Commission to study the effectiveness of the Department of Juvenile Services to provide effective social services, we are taking the first step at addressing the gaps in the continuum of care for justice involved- youth.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt
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