

March 25, 2025

House Appropriations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding

My name is Sophie Huang and I am testifying on behalf of the Special Education Equal Development Society (SEEDS) as the organization president in support of Senate Bill 599. SEEDS represents a community of over 150 families with neurodivergent children, many of whom with behavioral health challenges.

SEEDS strongly supports SB599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program – Funding. This bill would provide level funding to the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program for the next three years to maintain critical behavioral health care services.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program was established in 2019 to build a more robust behavioral health crisis response system. These types of services provide immediate support when someone is experiencing serious emotional distress or crisis. Crisis services such as mobile crisis teams, urgent care clinics, and crisis residential beds are essential components of the behavioral health care continuum and provide an important alternative to calling 911 or going to the hospital Emergency Department.

The General Assembly mandated \$5 million for the last four years and the Behavioral Health Administration indicated that they plan to maintain it at this level for FY26. This stable funding has been used effectively to serve thousands of children and adults experiencing a crisis. It is also a smart investment that saves the state money in the long run by preventing higher hospital and criminal justice costs. Hospital EDs and the criminal justice system are not the appropriate setting to help resolve a crisis or help someone to stabilize. They are chaotic and not designed with mental health crises in mind. They are also expensive. The alternative interventions that are funded by this program must be maintained, especially considering the struggles the state continues to have with pediatric hospital overstay and lengthy ED wait times.

Serving disabled individuals, especially children, across multiple counties in Maryland, SEEDS has witnessed first-hand a continued need for adequate and accommodating behavioral health resources. Many neurodivergent children struggle in large, busy environments such as a hospital ED and funding for crisis services as alternatives can provide enormous comfort to worried parents and other caretakers. SB599 would be crucial for all Marylanders to feel safe and supported.

Continuing funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program is a smart investment. **SEEDS urges the House Appropriations Committee to consider this Senate bill and pass SB599.**