



March 25, 2025

House Appropriations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their experience as parents, caregivers, and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection, systems navigation, support groups, and educational training and workshops.

Maryland Coalition of Families 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.

Many of the families we serve utilize crisis services frequently. Some have had the experience of waiting for days or even weeks in the emergency department for a bed at an appropriate facility for their loved one. The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant must have stable funding to continue



strengthening Maryland's behavioral health system, Maryland's families, individuals, and communities.

Continuing funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program is a smart investment.
Maryland Coalition of Families urges the House Appropriations Committee to pass SB599.

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