



Montgomery County

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March 25, 2025

House Appropriations Committee TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Montgomery County builds communities of peers to provide support, education, and advocacy for all affected by mental illness. That's one in five people — more than 200,000 people in Montgomery County alone.

Having a properly staffed and organized crisis response system can be the difference between life and death for people experiencing a psychiatric emergency. **NAMI Montgomery County 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 a behavioral health 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 an Emergency Department at a hospital.

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 crisis. It is also a smart investment that saves the state money in the long run by preventing higher hospital and criminal justice costs. The services funded by this program must be maintained to divert people from more expensive settings. This is especially important due to the ongoing challenges the state has regarding pediatric hospital overstay and lengthy ED wait times.

Too many Marylanders with mental health conditions receive criminal justice responses rather than health responses to their needs, and services for mental health are considerably less available than for physical health conditions. Quality of care for Maryland residents should not depend on the individual's diagnosis.

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