

January 15, 2025

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and esteemed members of the Finance Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness-Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

People living with mental health conditions face many obstacles to accessing healthcare, housing, employment, and other aspects of life that others may take for granted. The barriers that people living with mental illness must endure can prevent them from living well. The stigma and misunderstandings that surround mental illness exacerbate those challenges. Discriminatory language within Maryland law is both harmful to people living with mental health conditions and misleading to the general public, and it is a significant part of generating and perpetuating stigma.

Outdated language describing mental illness oftentimes reflects negative stereotypes, increasing stigma and discrimination. It is also technically inaccurate. The term “mental hygiene” may imply that people with mental health conditions are not “clean,” or cannot be clean, which is both untrue and dehumanizing. Mental health professionals do not disinfect a person’s brain, they provide care and services to the whole person. Not only that, but it is time to bring the Maryland Code up to date. For many years now, healthcare providers, advocates, and people with lived experience have utilized the term “mental health” as opposed to outdated, inaccurate, and harmful terms like mental hygiene, and it is time that the Maryland Code reflected that.

NAMI Maryland is committed to advancing efforts to destigmatize mental health conditions and mental healthcare. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt  
Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

**Contact:** Morgan Mills  
Compass Government Relations  
Mmills@compassadvocacy.com