



February 7, 2025

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 577 – Public Safety – Distribution of Literature to Purchasers of Firearms and Ammunition

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore strongly supports SB 577 – Public Safety - Distribution of Literature to Purchasers of Firearms and Ammunition. This bill would require establishments that sell firearms to distribute literature about gun safety, suicide prevention, and mental health awareness. This is a commonsense approach that could save lives at minimal cost for the state.

Death by suicide is a critical public health challenge and a leading cause of death in the United States. Nationally, almost 50,000 people died by suicide in 2022, and in Maryland, 608 people died. Suicide represents the third leading cause of death in the state for Marylanders aged 10-34.¹ This loss of life is terrible, especially considering that death by suicide can often be prevented with timely mental health interventions.

Firearms play a significant role in deaths by suicide. In Maryland, 44% of all suicide deaths involve firearms.² Providing basic information about suicide prevention and mental health to individuals purchasing firearms and ammunition can help to prevent such tragedies.

BHSB provides information about mental health and substance use resources through digital marketing, print, and through direct education at community events. We aim to raise awareness of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and the role it can play in providing supportive counseling to someone in distress and in connecting people with ongoing resources in the community. We make these basic materials available throughout the community. Providing similar information to those purchasing a firearm, including information about 988, is just common sense. **We urge a favorable report on SB 577.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

References:

¹ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Suicide Data: Maryland. Last updated May 2024. Available at https://www.datocms-assets.com/12810/1725472388-maryland_2024-state-fact-sheet.pdf

² Ibid, May 2024.