



**Testimony on SB 260
Labor and Employment – Leave With Pay –
Bereavement Leave (Family Bereavement Act)**

Senate Finance Committee

February 12, 2020

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland is the professional organization for providers of community-based mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. Our members serve the majority of the almost-300,000 children and adults who access care through the public behavioral health system. We provide outpatient treatment, residential and day programs, case management and assertive community treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention.

CBH members routinely provide paid bereavement leave for the death of an immediate family member, in addition to paid time off for sickness or vacations. Our concern is that SB 260 would extend that paid time off to bereavement for pets. Organizations serving Medicaid recipients with serious mental health and substance use disorders already struggle with high staff vacancies due to a combination of low salaries and employees on extended or intermittent leave (such as that covered by the Americans With Disabilities Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, and the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act). These high staff vacancies are even more pronounced in residential programs that operate 24/7, overnight, and on weekends. So while we empathize with the pain caused by the loss of a pet, we must balance the desire for time off against the needs of our clients.

CBH is also concerned that the bill does not define “pet.” We are unsure as to whether the bill covers only domesticated animals, such as dogs and cats, or also livestock, fish, and other non-traditional pets. Further we know of no way to easily verify the death of a pet since there is no death notice or other proof.

For these reasons we urge an unfavorable report on SB 260.