

**Testimony in Support of SB0833 Adult Protective Services - Vulnerable Adults
Registry - Investigations and Records of Abuse and Neglect and Workgroup Study**

Senate Judicial Proceedings

March 4, 2020

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a voluntary, non-profit citizens' organization concerned with all aspects of behavioral health. MHAMD's Coalition on Mental Health and Aging (the Coalition) is comprised of representatives from aging, mental health, consumer, family and professional associations and government agencies working together to improve the quality and accessibility of behavioral health assessment, treatment, recovery and illness prevention services for older Marylanders. This testimony represents support from both MHAMD and the Coalition on Mental Health and Aging for SB0833.

The Adult Protective Services statute has remained relatively unchanged since the 1980's. What has changed is the incidence of abuse, neglect and exploitation of older adults and adults with disabilities. Rates of abuse are climbing fast and individuals with behavioral health disorders are particularly vulnerable to abuse of all sorts.

Unfortunately, there are perpetrators of abuse who move across care settings and through communities and a lack of adequate protections for current and future victims of their crimes. SB0833 seeks to prevent abusers from working with vulnerable adults through the establishment of a registry, with a balance of appeal options that are fair and just in light of the terrible crimes of abuse. This approach has been effective in Maryland's child welfare system and SB0833 leverages that success by incorporating language that mirrors the Child Protective Services law established to curb child abuse. In addition, SB0833 calls for a workgroup to study best practices for a Vulnerable Adult Registry in Maryland reflecting an intent to make the processes and outcomes the best they can be in fairness to all.

The safety and quality of care for vulnerable adults is a top priority for MHAMD and members of the Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging. We support our colleagues working in social service programs of the Department of Human Services who identify SB0833 to be the best immediate solution to a systemic problem of elder abuse and we join them in our respectful request for your favorable vote on SB0833.