

February 11, 2020

House Bill 541 - Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission - Training Requirements - Hate Crimes - SUPPORT

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland strongly supports HB 541, legislation that would require better tracking of hate crimes statewide through enhanced reporting and training.

NAMI Maryland is proud to serve on Attorney General Frosh's Hate Crimes Task Force and we're pleased he chose to include us. Individuals with disabilities like severe mental illness can be targets for hate crimes and it's been important to us that behavioral health and health issues in general have been a larger part of this important discussion.

As the crimes are on the rise nationally, the value of a bill like this is that we'll be able to understand and identify true problem areas in our state and begin to address the nature of this problem. As representatives from law enforcement (local, state and federal), the Attorney General's staff, and representatives from organizations which represent audiences that are often the targets of hate incidents and hate crimes – racial, ethnic, religious and other minorities.

As the Executive Director of NAMI Maryland, I've worked for years to improve the response of the criminal justice system to people with mental and behavioral health issues, and know that law enforcement can make a world of difference and even prevent injury and fatalities, when they are given the tools to recognize and intervene effectively with individuals with mental illness and their communities. Making sure that all police departments across our varied state are adept in recognizing, reporting and intervening in hate incidents and hate crimes will help reduce and even prevent them.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on HB 541.

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