

**House Bill 1476 Independent Oversight and Review Board for Health Care of Inmates in State
Correctional Facilities - Establishment**

Judiciary Committee

March 6, 2020

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 1476.

HB 1476 establishes an independent oversight and review board to review and make recommendations related to the health care of incarcerated individuals.

“According to a 2017 report from the U.S. Department of Justice, about 37% of incarcerated individuals have a history of mental health problems, including more than 24% previously diagnosed with major depressive disorder, 17% with bipolar disorder, 13% with a personality disorder and 12% with post-traumatic stress disorder¹”. These numbers increase for inmates in jail, where “one-third have been previously diagnosed with major depressive disorder and almost one-quarter with bipolar disorder”.² Correctional facilities are increasingly becoming occupied of inmates with a mental illness. It is reported that four in 10 inmates in need of treatment services received them while incarcerated³. This ratio demonstrates that more than half of incarcerated individuals are not connected to supportive services essential for recovery.

Jails and prisons are not the appropriate facility for a person with a mental illness and could worsen their condition. Incarcerated individuals with a mental illness are inadequately treated in jails and should be diverted to alternative resources equipped to respond to their needs. However, when a person with a mental health disorder is incarcerated, then the necessary care should be available to facilitate their treatment and recovery.

MHAMD supports the development of an Independent Oversight and Review Board for Health Care of Inmates in Correctional Facilities and would welcome the opportunity to serve with the group. It is vital that we make sure to have the appropriate supports and services are in place in jails across our state to meet the needs of inmates.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 1476 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/03/mental-health-inmates>

² *Id.*

³ <https://goccp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/justice-reinvestment-sa-mh-gaps-needs-20161231.pdf>