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**House Bill 589 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2021**

Appropriations Committee

March 3, 2021

**Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

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 and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). **We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony supporting House Bill 589 with an amendment to ensure the Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC) has the funding necessary to continue its critical work.**

CHRC was established in 2005 to provide grant funding for creative community-based projects to expand access to health care in underserved communities. Since its inception, CHRC has awarded over 300 grants totaling almost \$80 million to critical safety net programs in jurisdictions across the state. The initiatives funded by CHRC are innovative programs that recognize the impact of social determinants on the overall health of a community.

CHRC funding has been critical in addressing inequities in access to behavioral health care, a function that is important now more than ever. Existing disparities in access to mental health and substance use treatment have become even starker in the wake of COVID-19.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on Marylanders' collective mental and emotional health. But as with the virus itself, the resulting behavioral health crisis is not affecting us all equally. Black and brown individuals, older adults and lower-income families are bearing the brunt. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported a much higher suicide risk among racial/ethnic minority groups, and while overdose fatalities in Maryland actually decreased among white individuals by over 10% during the first six months of 2020 as compared to 2019, substance use deaths increased 35% among Black and brown Marylanders during the same period.

Any reduction to the Community Health Resource Commission's budget would hinder Maryland's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in communities that have been hardest hit. **For this reason, we urge you to reject the language in HB 589 that limits funding for CHRC.**

*For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865*