

**House Bill 560 Discrimination in Housing – Reentry-Into-Society Status**

Environment & Transportation Committee

February 9, 2021

**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 this **testimony in support of House Bill 560**.

HB 560 expands the housing policy of the State to prohibit housing discrimination and provide fair housing to all citizens regardless of reentry-into-society status. The bill defines ‘reentry-into-society status’ as having completed a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment.

Having a safe and secure place to live is an important part of mental wellness. People with housing problems are at greater risk of mental health and substance use problems. Unfortunately, a prior criminal record is often a barrier to securing stable housing.

This is particularly troubling given the high rate of mental health and substance use disorders among the incarcerated population. According to the “Crisis in Corrections: The Mentally Ill in America’s Prisons” about 20 percent of prison inmates have a serious mental illness, 30 to 60 percent have substance abuse problems and, when including broad-based mental illnesses, the percentages increase significantly. For example, 50 percent of males and 75 percent of female inmates in state prisons, and 75 percent of females and 63 percent of male inmates in jails, will experience a mental health problem requiring mental health services in any given year.

Stable housing is a vital component of a successful reentry. It helps ex-offenders become more engaged in community services and makes them less likely to recidivate. Accordingly, ensuring access to housing upon release is often a core recommendation among stakeholders operating in this field. Following passage of the Justice Reinvestment Act, a subcommittee of the Maryland Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Partnership recommended as a priority using reinvestment dollars to support a variety of housing programs for ex-offenders.

More recently, Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford’s Commission to Study Mental and Behavioral Health in Maryland held a two-day state summit on behavioral health and the criminal justice system. The summit – which was facilitated by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) GAINS Center – used a Sequential Intercept Model (SIM)<sup>1</sup> framework to identify gaps and make recommendations for addressing challenges faced by people with behavioral health needs who become involved with the criminal justice system. A group of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice/sim-overview>



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cross-system stakeholders representing all regions of the state participated in one of three breakout workgroups, and **every group identified housing as the main challenge/priority.**

For the reasons above, MHAMD strongly supports HB 560 and urges a favorable report.

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