



Testimony before Finance Committee
Support

SB 557 – Suicide Treatment Improvements Act

February 17, 2021

Maryland's Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW – MD), which represents professional social workers across the state, supports SB 557 – Suicide Treatment Improvements Act.

SB 557 creates additional requirements for systems that interact with persons experiencing suicidal ideations and may be in crisis. It requires specific training for crisis hotline staff and police officers, updates to state psychiatric facilities, and prohibits insurance carriers from charging for counseling and assessing suicidal individuals. Social workers are often involved at each of the affected systems that interact with individuals in crisis.

Mental health practitioners and experts have been increasingly concerned throughout the COVID-19 outbreak about the signs of increased suicidality across demographics. Calls to the Baltimore crisis hotline, Here2Help, doubled between April and July 2020, and as of September the number of callers threatening suicide was five times higher than at the beginning of the pandemic.¹ In Montgomery County alone, nearly 400 residents went to a hospital emergency room reporting self-injury or suicidal thoughts between July 1 and August 15, 2020².

With rates of suicide completion steadily rising in Maryland over the past two decades and the increased rates of reported suicidal ideation during COVID-19, systematic changes must be made to support individuals in crisis.¹ The requirements of SB 557 will improve care for individuals in crisis at the entry points to care and progression through treatment. Additional training for crisis hotline staff and police officers who have the first contact with these individuals can save lives.

For these reasons we ask you give a favorable report on SB 557.

Respectfully,

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¹Wegner, Y. (2020, September 29). As coronavirus rolls on in Maryland, mental health toll surges, with experts fearing rise in suicides. Baltimore Sun. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-hs-mental-health-covid-20200929-yzjfdfc2ijb4vab7o3v4g7q25a-story.html>

²Montgomery County. (2020, September 10). Montgomery County provides resources to help residents prevent and understand suicide during National Suicide Prevention Month. [Press Release]. Retrieved from https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=26777