

**Senate Bill 399 Maryland Transit Administration – Disabled Reduced Fare Program for
Opioid Treatment Program Patients – Modifications**

Finance Committee

February 3, 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 testimony in support of Senate Bill 399.

SB 399 allows Opioid Treatment Programs to issue identification cards to participating patients to receive reduced Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) transit fare.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on opioid use and opioid-related deaths in Maryland and across the United States. Between January 2020 and June 2020, there was a 9.1% increase in fatal drug overdoses and alcohol-related deaths, 90% of which resulted from opioid use. The Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center confirmed that the pandemic has been and is exacerbating substance use disorders, particularly due to social isolation, disruption of support, restricted access to care, and economic distress.¹

While it is often said that addiction does not discriminate, data shows that those without a stable income are more likely to face addiction. Substance use disorder rates are twice as high in unemployed persons than those who are employed.² The US Department of Health and Human Services has also reported that Medicaid recipients are more likely to be prescribed opioids at higher doses and longer durations.³

At current rates, a monthly full fare MTA pass is \$74.00, compared to the \$22.00 reduced fare.⁴ By allowing Opioid Treatment Program participants to receive reduced fare, Maryland can actively reduce part of the financial barrier to treatment. For these reasons, MHAMMD supports SB 399 and urges a favorable report.

¹The Washington Post, (2020, September 23). *Overdoses and alcohol-related deaths rising during pandemic.*

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/overdoses-and-alcohol-related-deaths-rising-during-pandemic/2020/09/23/1c96d684-fd9e-11ea-b0e4-350e4e60cc91_story.html

²Addiction Center, (2020, December 8). *How does addiction impact low-income Americans?* <https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/low-income-americans/>

³National Institute on Drug Abuse, (2017, October 25). *Addressing the opioid crisis means confronting socioeconomic disparities.*

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2017/10/addressing-opioid-crisis-means-confronting-socioeconomic-disparities>

⁴Maryland Transit Administration, (n.d.). *Regular Fares.* <https://www.mta.maryland.gov/regular-fares>