

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

### HB 849 Public Health - Medical Records - Fees

March 24, 2021

#### Senate Finance Committee

My name is Carmela George. I am the Manager of Adult Services with the Montgomery County Local Behavioral Health Authority and the SSI/SSDI Outreach Access & Recovery (SOAR) county Lead. I have been helping consumers in need of disability benefits via the SOAR Program since 2015 when I served as a street outreach worker. In my capacity as local SOAR lead, I have oversight of 80+ SOAR trained specialists who work with individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness and who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 849.

For individuals living with behavioral health disorders and facing homelessness, obtaining disability and other public benefits is often what opens the door to adequate healthcare, rehabilitation, and housing. Due to the transient nature of the population we serve and the severity of symptoms, most individuals have no source of income, no natural supports, and are often too impaired to maintain employment. The regular process of obtaining benefits can take up to a year to complete. Eliminating fees associated with medical records for SSI/SSDI applicants would significantly improve access, care coordination, and reduce undue delays. In my experience, when healthcare providers insist on payment for medical records, it not only disrupts the disability application process, but also discourages consumers, who are already overwhelmed, from applying for needed benefits and resources.

HB849 would promote equity and ensure that the most vulnerable individuals in our community get the help and resources needed to attain better quality lives. For this reason, I support HB849 and urge a favorable report.

Thank you.

#### **Carmela George**

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