

House Bill 548 Human Services - Trauma-Informed Care - Commission and Training

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 9, 2021

Position: Support

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 548.

HB 548 seeks to establish a Commission on Trauma-Informed Care, tasked with prioritizing the trauma-responsive and trauma-informed delivery of State services that impact children, youth, families, and older adults. MHAMD is glad to again support this bill and to see that language has been expanded from last year to include older adults, the fastest growing demographic in Maryland.

It is common for older adults to have endured traumatic events at some time in their lives. In later life, it is common for people to experience traumatic physical, emotional, mental, environmental and social changes that are threatening, unwanted and uncontrollable. When trauma survivors are again exposed to or triggered by circumstances that are threatening, unwanted and uncontrollable, they are at a much higher risk for adverse consequences such as somatic and behavioral health disorders.

Additionally, about 50% of children are exposed to a traumatic event, and as many as 67% of trauma survivors experience lasting psychosocial impairment. Trauma can affect a child's brain and delay certain development which can make it harder for the child to concentrate and study. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the Family Informed Trauma Treatment Center in Maryland, nearly one-third of children in Baltimore City have two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These ACEs have been found to have a direct impact on the normative development and lifelong health of individuals. ACE's include extreme poverty, family problems, experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse and discrimination. All of these can be extremely traumatic for children. ACEs are a significant risk factor for mental health and substance use disorders and can impact prevention efforts.

There is a growing body of research substantiating the relationship between traumatic experiences and behavioral health disorders. Likewise, there is evidence that service programs in areas of health, criminal justice, human services, rehabilitation services, etc. might be structured and delivered in ways that are re-traumatizing and therefore ineffective, or worse, damaging to

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the people they serve. HB 548 is a promising step towards bringing Maryland's public services into alignment with trauma-informed standards for program policies and procedures, workforce training and systems development that will benefit rather than harm individuals who have experienced, and need to heal, from trauma. As such, the Mental Health Association of Maryland supports the goals and intents of this bill and urges a favorable report on House Bill 548.