

House Bill 209 Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee

Health and Government Operations Committee

January 26, 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 House Bill 209.

HB 209 establishes a Suicide Fatality Review Committee to identify and address factors contributing to suicide deaths in the state and facilitate system changes to prevent suicide deaths.

Mental health practitioners and experts have been on alert throughout the COVID-19 outbreak for signs of increased suicidality across all 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 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, 2020.²

Rates of suicide completion have steadily risen in Maryland over the past two decades, and rates of reported suicidal ideation have grown too quickly during COVID-19 to be ignored.¹ HB 209 expands the surveillance and investigation of all suicide deaths by convening a stakeholder group to review suicide deaths occurring in the State and to develop strategies to prevent them. This bill aligns with the national campaign coordinated by the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General to recommend that each state establish a suicide mortality review committee to monitor and institute changes to decrease suicide mortality.

Given the severity of the situation, it is necessary to bring together key stakeholders to allow for confidential identification, investigation, and dissemination of information to reduce suicide. For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 209 and urges a favorable report.

¹Wegner, Y. (2020, September 29). As coronavirus rolls on in Maryland, mental health toll surges, with experts fearing spike 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

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