



February 4, 2021

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
House Health & Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support - House Bill 605: Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid

Dear Chairman Pendergrass and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support House Bill 605: Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid (HB 605). The United States has been actively involved in military conflicts for almost two decades with many United States military personnel serving multiple deployments to places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Africa. Deployments of this nature are extremely stressful situations as modern-day combat has become much more non-conventional. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other psychiatric illnesses are extremely high with our military veterans. Unfortunately, suicide amongst active-duty soldiers and veterans has become all too commonplace. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the individual branches of the United States military are struggling to provide mental health care to both veterans and soldiers alike. Maryland, through bills such as HB 605, is taking thoughtful steps in assisting veterans and their families to heal.

HB 605, if codified, will increase awareness of mental illness and substance use disorders as well as attune our community to the idea of early intervention. The training guidelines of HB 605 will reduce stigmas associated with mental illness and treatment; connect more military personnel and veterans to meaningful mental health services; potentially reduce fatalities due to overdose and suicide in the military community and establish the complex support system that co-morbid conditions create.



**Washington
Psychiatric Society**

MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report of HB 605. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee