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## House Bill 108 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications Health and Government Operations Committee February 2, 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 and substance use (collectively referred to as behavioral health). **We appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony in support of House Bill 108.** 

House Bill 108 will increase and extend funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program, which is a key component of Maryland's Behavioral Health Crisis Response System (BHCRS). Crisis response services are an essential element of any comprehensive system of behavioral health care. They significantly reduce preventable behavioral health crises and offer earlier intervention to stabilize crises more quickly and at the lowest level of care appropriate. A comprehensive crisis response system provides effective treatment for people with mental health and substance use needs while decreasing avoidable incarcerations, emergency room visits, hospitalizations and readmissions.

Established by the General Assembly in 2018 with near unanimous support, the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program awards grants to local behavioral health authorities to develop and expand crisis response services in jurisdictions across the state. In just two years the program has expanded mobile crisis teams in Baltimore City, Caroline, Carroll, Dorchester, Harford, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, and Wicomico Counties. The program is also supporting walk-in crisis and behavioral health urgent care services in Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, and Harford Counties.

A well-funded and fully functioning BHCRS is important now more than ever. Up to 40% of Marylanders have reported feeling anxious or depressed because of the coronavirus pandemic, and state crisis hotlines are receiving a startling increase in calls from individuals at risk for suicide. Drug- and alcohol-related deaths jumped by more than 18% in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the same period a year earlier, including a 30% increase in opioid-related deaths. A recent study of over 69 million patients in the U.S. found that individuals who contracted the coronavirus had a significantly higher likelihood of developing a mental illness within three months of their COVID-19 diagnosis.

If we expect to meet the increased demand for behavioral health services, House Bill 108 is essential. For this reason, **MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.** 

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865