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Prince George's County

Health and Government
Operations Committee

Subcommittees

Health Occupations and
Long Term Care

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 872 (SHEILA E. HIXSON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS – ESTABLISHMENT)

Chairwoman Shane E. Pendergrass and honorable members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, I am pleased and grateful for the opportunity to testify *in support* of House Bill 872,

House Bill 872 would create a matching grant program for community based behavioral health clinics that serve veterans, active service members and their families. The program would be named after our former colleague Delegate Sheila Hixson who tragically lost her son (a Marine for 27 years) to suicide several years ago. I am pleased to have Delegate Hixson's daughter here today who will speak in favor of the bill.

Only nonprofit organizations that serve service members, veterans and their families would be eligible for grants. The program would be administered by the Department of Health, which would develop the application procedures and the selection criteria for evaluating proposals. All grants would be required to be matched by the nonprofit organization. The bill allows – but does not mandate – state funding of up to \$2.5 million a year towards the program. The bill is modeled after a program in Texas that has been very successful in supporting programs that serve the behavioral health needs of active service members and veterans in that state. We have nearly 400,000 veterans in Maryland, many of whom were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan and many of whom are living with PTSD or major depression.

The statistics about veteran suicide in Maryland are grim:

- 18% of all suicides in Maryland are veterans and veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide as the general public
- 1/8th of veteran suicides are by Guards/Reserves who were not activated and therefore, not eligible for VA services
- 62% of veterans who take their own life are not under the care of the VA at the time of their death
- As you will hear from the witnesses that follow, COVID has made the problem even more pressing, with suicide ideation 30% higher among the clients of one clinic as compared to before COVID
- These statistics highlight the need for support for community-based behavioral health to fill the gaps in VA services through the passage of this bill.

Speaking today in support of the bill are:

- **Dr. Anneke Vandenbroek**, Senior Vice President and Clinic Director for the Steven A Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals
- **Lynne Hixson Hunter**, Sheila's Hixson's daughter
- **Patrick Guibao**, representing the American Legion
- **Danny Farrar**, Founder/President of Platoon 22

Sincerely,

Nicholas Peter Charles

Nick Charles

Maryland State Delegate - District 25