

**House Bill 794 Public Health – Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council**

Appropriations Committee

March 1, 2022

**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 794.

HB 794 establishes the Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council in the Maryland Department of Health. The Council is responsible for providing findings and recommendations regarding allocating funds based on substance use disorder rates, overdose deaths, service availability, and disparities in access to care.

In 2019, Maryland established the Opioid Restitution Fund consisting of all revenue resulting from judgments against or settlements with opioid manufacturers, research associations, and industry members to address the opioid crisis. Maryland saw 2,518 opioid-related fatal overdoses in 2020 and 1,217 in the first half of 2021. Additionally, Maryland's emergency departments saw 5,548 non-fatal visits involving opioids in the first half of 2021.<sup>1</sup>

As of August 2021, Maryland has received \$12 million through legal settlements. Input from the individuals impacted by the opioid crisis is critical to determining how funds are distributed throughout the State. HB 794 requires representation from community-based programs, public health experts, individuals with lived experience and their families, and individuals impacted by disparities in access to care, in addition to State officials. Individuals in recovery and the family members of those who have struggled with an opioid use disorder bring valuable insight to strategy discussions. Clinicians have first-hand experience with best practices in the harm reduction field.

The Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council aligns with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health recommendations for funding transparency.<sup>2</sup> By determining areas of need, receiving input from key stakeholders, and ensuring diverse representation, Maryland can ensure equitable and fair distribution of key funds to address the opioid crisis and reduce opioid-related fatalities across the State. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 794 and urges a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup>Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center,

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/c546d22ec4a946cbb700a282f53c6eb7/>

<sup>2</sup>Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://opioidprinciples.jhsph.edu/principle-5-develop-a-fair-and-transparent-process-for-deciding-where-to-spend-the-funding/>

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