

February 22, 2022

Senate Bill 460 – Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care – Establishment SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

Children and youth with mental health and substance use needs have fewer treatment options than adults in Maryland. And, some children who experience severe symptoms with their mental health condition may need a higher level of care than an outpatient programs can provide. They may require services that require observation and structured activities around the clock, which they are unable to receive living at home. Residential treatment facilities are one way to meet these needs.

Usually, children requiring this level of care have repeatedly demonstrated behaviors that have been difficult to manage and proven unsafe to themselves or others. In a residential treatment facility, they can receive intense comprehensive treatment and the necessary structure and supervision to keep them safe. Residential facilities provide security and restricted access to ensure the safety of the child, staff and visitors. Children can remain in these programs for several months, with the ultimate goal of returning home and reuniting with their families. Most programs have:

- Structured treatment plans and schedules that promote and reinforce healthy behavior
- Individual and group therapies
- Family involvement, including family therapy, which can increase the chances of a successful return to the home environment
- An academic component where children attend school either within the facility or nearby

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a child with disabilities be provided a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment from birth. Children with severe mental health issues are already facing additional obstacles, and paying for what they are legally entitled to should not be a challenge. SB 656 is the first step towards ensuring that Maryland children can receive quality education alongside their mental health treatment.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on **SB 656**.

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