



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: SB637 – Health and Health Insurance – Behavioral Health Services – Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)

SPONSOR: Senator Augustine

COMMITTEE: Finance

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 637**, which requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide reimbursement for behavioral health peer recovery, measurement-based care, and crisis response services. It requires insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations to provide coverage and reimbursement for critical behavioral health services, which will increase availability of home- and community-based wraparound services and reduce reliance on law enforcement and emergency departments for crisis care.

The Federal government mandated launch of the 9-8-8 mental health crisis hotline is expected to create a 3 to 5-fold increase in calls for mental health-related emergency services. Individuals calling 9-8-8 will need community resources that are not in existence at this time or are currently underfunded, such as mobile crisis services and a crisis receiving center. Most of these services rely on inadequate and temporary grant funding.

Without stable funding streams for mental health crisis services, citizens will call a hotline that does not have anything available to help them. This will be a frustrating experience and could discourage them from seeking mental health services in the future. **SB637** establishes sustainable, insurance-based funding streams for mental health services – which are in higher demand than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring proper response to mental health crises can be a matter of life and death – people with mental illness are 16 times more likely to be shot and killed by police.¹

¹ Center for Law and Social Policy, <https://www.clasp.org>

The numbers are even higher for black people with mental health conditions.² Approximately 10% of all police contacts involve people with serious mental illness, and yet, we do not equip our emergency response systems with the services needed to safely address these needs.³ Passing **SB637** will codify funding streams for crisis services to ensure mental health professionals are sustainably integrated into emergency response systems.

For the reason stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 637** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

² Center for Law and Social Policy, <https://www.clasp.org>

³ *ibid*