



March 30, 2022

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – HB 699: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services

Dear Chairman Kelley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS supports House Bill 699: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services (HB 699), though the societies prefer the bill as originally drafted. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (ME's Office) investigates sudden, violent, and unexpected deaths. Unfortunately, for many, the sudden loss of a loved one or friend can be traumatic and overwhelming, leaving those close to the deceased to suffer traumatic loss with little in terms of support and counseling.

HB 699 as originally drafted attempted to remedy that reality by providing access to State-funded support groups and resources at the time when grief may be first experienced. Such services, immediately available at the ME's Office, would have been a meaningful first step in guiding loved ones and friends of a deceased through the grieving and bereavement process. As the bill progressed, many of its more holistic and beneficial provisions were left behind. Nonetheless, HB 699 is still an incremental step towards helping those close to a deceased in coping with traumatic loss by making digital and print grief resources and educational materials available both on the ME's Office website and at the office itself.

Therefore, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on HB 699. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee