

## **Written Testimony Regarding HB0699 - Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services**

By: Ashley Badgley, Suicide Prevention and Postvention Coordinator at Grassroots Crisis Intervention Services in Columbia, MD

I write in support of HB0699 which is summarized as, "Requiring the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in coordination with the Behavioral Health Administration, to establish a grief counseling services program; and authorizing the use of funds from the Opioid Restitution Fund to support the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and Behavioral Health Administration in providing grief counseling services and resources on grief."

As a professional in the field of suicide prevention, intervention and postvention, I see the devastation from suicide on a daily basis. The families who have lost loved ones are forever changed, and their grief is palpable.

Especially for those who have lost a close family member, immediately after their loved one's suicide, they are often tasked with having to make arrangements such as funerals, memorials, etc. When experiencing the unique grief that comes with suicide loss, these tasks can seem especially insurmountable. Just having the space immediately or shortly after their loved one's death to talk about this pain through grief counseling could serve as a huge support.

Many professional support groups such as the one that I run in Howard County usually wait a few months after a death to admit new members. This is for the safety of the members already in the group and the new members. That raw grief can be too much for many people, however this delay leaves new survivors of suicide in limbo for a few months. That is a time when they need the most support.

The struggle to find a person to talk to and a place to go where grief is understood is hard. Grief counseling is unique in its technique and the immediate availability of grief counseling to loved ones after a death by suicide can and will save lives.

It is for these reasons and many more that I support HB0699 and call for the establishment of grief counseling services and using the funding sources as suggested in the bill.

Maryland has suffered too much death by suicide, and we must work to prevent it. When tragedy does strike, however, we must support the survivors to the best of our ability.

Thank you for your time and please vote in support of HB0699.

Sincerely,  
Ashley Badgley, MA  
Suicide Prevention and Postvention Coordinator  
Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center