



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

February 16, 2022

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is submitting this letter of information for House Bill (HB) 699 - Office of the Chief Medical Examiner – Grief Counseling Services.

As currently written, HB 699 requires the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), in coordination with the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), to establish a grief counseling services program. BHA's role is to provide policy, regulations, and oversight of the public behavioral health system. BHA does not provide direct counseling services and doing so may be a potential conflict of interest. Additionally, creating a counseling service will lead to a large fiscal impact, as indicated in this bill's fiscal note.

MDH recently met with the bill sponsor, Delegate Lehman, to share this potential conflict of interest. Delegate Lehman developed sponsor amendments to clarify BHA's role in this legislation. If the sponsor amendments pass, BHA will be consulted in developing the program and corresponding resources, but BHA will not be the agency responsible for establishing a grief counseling program. As a result, if these amendments pass, the fiscal impact will also be significantly reduced as the majority of the cost in the fiscal note is related to developing a new counseling service.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Heather Shek, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs at (443) 695-4218 or heather.shek@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis R. Schrader".

Dennis R. Schrader
Secretary