

January 24, 2022

House Bill 32 – Mental Health Law – Petitions for Emergency Evaluation – Electronic Record - SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the House Health and Government Operations 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.

When mental illness is present, the potential for crisis is never far from mind. Crisis episodes related to mental illness can feel incredibly overwhelming. There's the initial shock, followed by a flood of questions — the most prominent of which is: "What can we do?" People experiencing mental illness — and the people who care for them — need access to health care services.

Unlike other health emergencies, people experiencing mental health crises have a more difficult time accessing important, potentially life-saving services, and on occasion, that is where emergency petitions come in. A physician, licensed clinical social worker, licensed clinical professional counselor, county health officer or designee, or law enforcement officer can file a petition for emergency evaluation for possible involuntary hospitalization. These professionals must give the petition to a law enforcement officer. If the petitioner cannot go in person to a law enforcement station, a law enforcement officer will sometimes go to the petitioner's office.

At this point in the process, individuals experiencing crisis need immediate care. This legislation will modernize the emergency petition process by permitting the use of digital signatures to ensure that individuals can be admitted to the hospital in a timely manner.

NAMI Maryland supports this legislation because it will provide greater certainty for people experiencing mental health crises and their loved ones during a process that can often be scary and traumatic – especially if an individual needs to travel far from home to find an in-patient bed. Like any other health crisis, it's important to address a mental health emergency quickly and effectively. With mental health conditions, crises can be difficult to predict because, often, there are no warning signs. Crises can occur even when treatment plans have been followed and mental health professionals are involved. Unfortunately, unpredictability is the nature of mental illness. This change will make a difficult time a bit smoother for individuals and their families.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on **HB 32**.

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