



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

January 24, 2022

House Bill 48 Public Health- Suicide Fatality Review Committee

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 48 Public Health-Suicide Fatality Review Committee. Thank you Delegate Belcastro for sponsoring this legislation.

According to the 2021 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, rates of suicides in Maryland's rural counties are consistently higher than those in predominantly urban counties.<sup>1</sup> The roots of these disparities are complex. Access to detailed data can help inform local efforts to respond to this growing public health concern.<sup>2</sup>

MRHA supports this legislation because it will provide more timely access to such data and facilitate coordination among the various state and local entities responding to and preventing suicide.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

*Jennifer Berkman, MEd Board President 443-783-0480*

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<sup>1</sup> University of Wisconsin. (2021) Number of deaths due to suicide per 100,000 adjusted for age: Maryland. Retrieved 1/24/2022 from: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/maryland/2021/measure/factors/161/data>

<sup>2</sup> Rural Health Information Hub. (2019) Rural suicide prevention toolkit. Retrieved 1/24/2022 from: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/suicide/1/nationwide>