

House Bill 48 Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee
Health and Government Operations Committee
January 26, 2022
Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 48.

HB 48 establishes a Suicide Fatality Review Committee to identify and address factors contributing to suicide deaths in the state and facilitate system changes to prevent suicide deaths.

Rates of suicide completion have steadily risen in Maryland over the past two decades, especially since 2015.¹ In 2019, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death across demographics and the 3rd leading cause of death for ages 10-34. That year 657 individuals died by suicide in Maryland.² While data for 2020 and 2021 are not yet available, several aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic are considered risk factors for suicide, including social isolation, financial problems, job problems or loss, and serious illness.³

Studies have shown a wide range of risk and protective factors to suicide, including sexual and gender identity, race, age, area of employment, presence of disabilities and behavioral health conditions, and prior experience with suicide.¹ HB 48 expands the surveillance and investigation of all suicide deaths by convening a stakeholder group to review suicide deaths occurring in the state and develop strategies to prevent them. This bill aligns with the national campaign coordinated by the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General to recommend that each state establish a suicide mortality review committee to monitor and institute changes to decrease suicide mortality.

Given the severity of the situation, it is necessary to bring together key stakeholders to allow for confidential identification, investigation, and dissemination of information to reduce suicide. For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 48 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention (2020). *Maryland State Suicide Prevention Plan 2020*. <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/2020%20Maryland%20State%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>

²American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (January 2021). *Suicide Data: Maryland*. <https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/state-fact-sheets/2021/2021-state-fact-sheets-maryland.pdf>

³Centers for Disease Control (May 2021). *Suicide Prevention: Risk and Protective Factors*. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>

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