

**Senate Bill 357 Adult Protective Services - Vulnerable Adults Registry - Investigations and
Records of Abuse and Neglect and Workgroup Study**

House Judiciary Committee

March 23, 2022

Position: Support

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 357.

SB 357 seeks to create a centralized database for abused and neglected vulnerable adults and would identify individuals responsible for the abuse or neglect. It would also establish a Workgroup to Study Best Practices for a Vulnerable Adult Registry in Maryland.

The Adult Protective Services statute has remained relatively unchanged since the 1980's, though the incidence of abuse, neglect and exploitation of older adults and adults with disabilities are climbing, and individuals with behavioral health disorders are particularly vulnerable to abuse. According to the National Council on Aging, approximately 1 in 10 Americans aged 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse, and one study estimated that only 1 in 14 cases of abuse are reported to authorities.

Unfortunately, there are perpetrators of abuse who move across care settings and through communities, and Maryland lacks adequate protections for current and future victims of their abuse. SB 357 seeks to prevent abusers from working with vulnerable adults through the establishment of a registry, with a balance of appeal options. This approach has been effective in Maryland's child welfare system and this bill leverages that success by incorporating language that mirrors the Child Protective Services law established to curb child abuse. In addition, SB 357 calls for a workgroup to study best practices for a Vulnerable Adult Registry in Maryland, reflecting an intent to make the processes and outcomes informed by best practices.

The safety and quality of care for vulnerable adults is a top priority for MHAMD, and we recognize SB 357 to be an important step forward in addressing the systemic problem of elder abuse. For these reasons the Mental Health Association of Maryland would urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 357.

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