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**Senate Bill 460 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender–Affirming Treatment
(Trans Health Equity Act)
Senate Finance
February 28, 2023
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

My name is Celia Serkin. I am Executive Director of the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Inc., a family support organization providing family peer services, family navigation, group support, education, recovery coaching, and advocacy to help parents and other primary caregivers who have children, youth, and/or young adults with behavioral health challenges (mental health, substance use or co-occurring disorders). We serve families from diverse cultural, racial, ethnic, social-economic, and religious backgrounds. The organization is run by parents who have raised children with behavioral health challenges. I have two children, now adults, who have behavioral health challenges.

The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Inc., is pleased to support Senate Bill 460, requiring, beginning on a certain date, the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide medically necessary gender–affirming treatment in a nondiscriminatory manner; requiring that the gender–affirming treatment be assessed according to nondiscriminatory criteria that are consistent with current clinical standards; prohibiting the Program from issuing an adverse benefit determination related to gender–affirming treatment unless a health care provider with experience prescribing or delivering gender–affirming treatment has reviewed and confirmed the appropriateness of the determination; and generally relating to gender–affirming treatment and the Maryland Medical Assistance Program.

The Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Inc. firmly believes that gender-affirming healthcare save lives. These practices lower rates of mental health issues, build self-esteem, and improve an individual’s overall quality of life. This medically necessary, life-saving care must be accessible for low-income Marylanders on Medicaid, just as it is under many private insurance plans. Research evinces that gender-affirming care greatly improves the mental health and overall well-being of gender diverse, transgender, and nonbinary children and adolescents. This low cost, high impact legislation will dramatically increase mental wellbeing, reduce suicidality, and save lives. It brings Maryland into compliance with federal legal guidelines. The federal government has named gender-affirming care as an “essential health benefit” protected under Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. This has been upheld in federal district courts and is backed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Every major medical association, including the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, found that this care is medically necessary. This bill ensures Maryland Medicaid offers comprehensive healthcare coverage to

the transgender community, in compliance with internationally recognized, best medical practices. Moreover, it reduces the significant health inequities faced by Maryland's transgender community.

This intervention is cost effective. These services are federally reimbursable and cost only 0.005% of our Medicaid budget. Maryland will save costs from reduced long-term physical and mental health complications, such as a 84% reduction in suicide attempts. Reducing discrimination is a cost saving measure - without gender-affirming care, transgender people are more likely to be "outed." 24% of trans Marylanders are evicted or denied housing because they are transgender, and nationwide are 4 times more likely to be victims of violent crime.

This bill will improve behavioral health outcomes and save lives. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. urges this committee to pass SB 460.**