



February 7, 2023

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 154 – Public Health - Mental Health Advance Directives - Awareness and Statewide Database

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 78,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 154 – Public Health - Mental Health Advance Directives - Awareness and Statewide Database. This bill would direct the Maryland Department of Health to develop and implement a mental health advance directive (MHAD) public awareness campaign and study the feasibility of a statewide MHAD database.

Much like other types of advance directives, MHADs are legal documents providing instructions on an individual’s treatment preferences. These plans are developed when an individual is stable and provide direction on preferred medications, preferred providers, and treatments to avoid if a person experiences a behavioral health crisis and is unable to direct their own care. Individuals who draft MHADs tend to experience significant improvement in their working alliance with their clinicians, fewer coercive crisis interventions, better correspondence about preferred and prescribed medications over time, and increased perception that their personal needs for mental health services are being met.¹

Despite the benefits of MHADs, these tools are not widely used. A public awareness campaign conducted by the state could help promote the use of these tools and improve the care of those experiencing a mental health crisis. Coercive treatment or treatments that an individual has had poor experiences only add to the trauma of a mental health crisis and should be avoided if possible. MHADs are an important tool to avoid such undesirable outcomes.

A statewide database would also help to improve provider access to these documents. The legislation directs the Behavioral Health Association to study the feasibility and cost of such a database. The state should consider how MHADs are added to the database, how providers access the documents, and what privacy safeguards must be put in place.

MHADs are critical to support person-centered care but more consumers need to be made aware of their value. SB154 is an important step towards doing so. **We urge a favorable report on SB 154.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

Endnotes:

¹ SAMHSA. *A Practical Guide to Psychiatric Advance Directives*. Available at https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/a_practical_guide_to_psychiatric_advance_directives.pdf.