

February 24, 2023

Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and distinguished members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

We recognize the importance of appropriate, accessible, and comprehensive behavioral health services in the State. Establishing a Commission to study and make recommendations to promote this is critical. All people with mental health conditions deserve accessible, affordable, and comprehensive health care.

Although Maryland has been a leader on behavioral health for many years, Marylanders are still struggling to get the help they need. As such, we encourage the development of solutions to these problems. The Behavioral Health Access and Treatment Model is the first step towards providing adequate, effective, and coordinated mental health treatment and services throughout Maryland.

As you know, there are more than 300,000 Marylanders served by our public behavioral health system. We appreciate the efforts in HB1148 to address the gaps in the Behavioral Health System—whether it's reimbursing behavioral health services, addressing gaps in services, examining needs of the geriatric and youth population, or assessing the health infrastructure currently available. We applaud the creation of the sub-workgroups within this commission as well. The geriatric, youth, and criminal-justice involved populations are extremely vulnerable. Mental health is important at every stage of life.

NAMI supports policies that improve and expand data collection, promote quantitative and qualitative outcomes measurement, and ensure accountability in mental health services delivery. Measurements should include outcomes in systems, specific programs, and providers, as well as for individuals.

Additionally, when reimagining healthcare, we need innovative solutions like those outlined in the Value-Based Purchasing Pilot program. Value-Based Purchasing rewards better value of care instead of simply volume of services. This pilot program that will help assess the feasibility of adoption of a state-wide plan. We realize that the legislation calls for \$600,000/year for this pilot, but it is absolutely worth it seeing as we know there will be a decrease in the need of emergency department utilization, inpatient hospitalization, as well as criminal justice system involvement. Wellness is an important investment that will lead to decreased public cost, improved resource allocation, and reduction in stigma, thus improving the lives of all those affected by serious mental illnesses.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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