

**Senate Bill 255 Public Health - Home- and Community-Based Services for Children and Youth**

House Health and Government Operations Committee

March 28, 2023

**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 work to advance a system of care that is readily and equitably accessible to children and families, which promotes mental wellbeing and resiliency, and that is family driven and youth guided.

MHAMD is in strong support of Senate Bill 255, which will take immediate action in addressing the behavioral health crisis that Maryland youth are facing today. This bill will increase our kids' access to home and community-based services, in turn reducing the over-reliance on costly inpatient care that we are forced to rely on today.

Maryland has lost significant ground in building a system of care for our children and youth, while the need has only risen significantly. Services are not available to many families, and especially for Black and brown youth. SB 255 would take immediate steps to restore critically needed home and community-based High-Fidelity Wraparound services for children and youth with high intensity needs.

High-Fidelity Wraparound offers care coordination through a centralized care management entity, along with a variety of formal and informal supports that keep youth with intensive behavioral health needs in their homes and out of the hospital. To ensure that High-Fidelity Wraparound, the gold standard in care, is readily available to youth with high intensity needs, Maryland must improve the performance of its existing community-based programs and increase access to and utilization of these effective, outcome driven models.

Children with significant mental health needs require specialized care coordination. Previously, Maryland provided a High-Fidelity Wraparound program with impressive outcomes, including reductions in inpatient hospitalization and residential treatment. **The program served 300-400 children per year.** In 2016, the administration dissolved these programs and implemented care coordination programs through the Targeted Case Management and 1915(i) programs, which are significantly inferior to what had been provided. Reimbursement rates are low, making it hard for providers to remain in business. As a result, multiple organizations and providers have been forced to close; supervision and training of Care Coordinators has declined; fidelity to the Wraparound model is not ensured; and eligibility requirements

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have been set very high – **only 10-40 children per year** have been enrolled in the program intended to replace the previous intensive level of care.

The failure of the Targeted Case Management and 1915(i) programs has fueled the adolescent hospital overstay crisis and soaring demand for residential treatment placements over the past few years. SB 255 will help Maryland prevent lengthy and unnecessary hospital stays for youth *and* reduce youth suicide by expanding access to behavioral health services and supports that keep kids out of crisis, support mental wellbeing, and address substance use disorders. This bill is one of the most immediate steps the legislature can take, today, in addressing this crisis.

Maryland's youth and families deserve a standard of care that can meet their needs We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 255.