

March 8, 2023

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and other esteemed members of the Judicial Proceedings 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.

The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services houses child advocacy centers across the State for abused children to access services. SB503 will establish a procedure for when there is a change in a child's healthcare provider at the center. Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), under this legislation, will be required to:

- Notify the children and parents/guardians if there is turnover in their health care providers
- Allow the departing provider the opportunity to have a final session to allow for closure and transition to the new providers
- Prohibit this notification if it would endanger the child
- Prohibit a final session if the provider was terminated due to harmful action or behavior

Additionally, this legislation clarifies that healthcare providers whistleblower protections will apply to healthcare providers who work at or for CACs.

There was an instance at one of these Centers in which over forty vulnerable children lost their therapist with no notice and no continuity of care. NAMI believes that children and adolescents with mental illness have the right and must be offered the opportunity to thrive in nurturing environments. When a provider that an abused child has come to know and trust leaves, this can cause a disruption in the child's treatment. This bill ensures that children are made aware of changes so that they can have closure with the providers they rely on.

The consumer is the reason the mental health treatment system exists. The consumer should be encouraged to participate fully in planning, monitoring, and evaluating treatment.

We must do better for the State's most vulnerable population.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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