

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee  
6 Bladen Street, Room 101  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and other members of the Judiciary 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.

In the state of Maryland, it is crucial that we protect minorities and communities of color. According to the FBI, hate crimes against minorities in MD increased by 286% from 2019 to 2020. Often, mental health and racial trauma go hand in hand and this correlation cannot be ignored. When acts of violence occur in the US, suspects are often labelled as “mentally ill” or “disturbed.” However, this is a fallacy seeing as only 5% of violent crimes in the US are committed by people with a serious mental illness. As a state, we cannot let hate crimes go unpunished and doing so would be a big mistake.

The unfortunate truth is that individuals with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. There is no reason to fear a person with a mental illness just because of their diagnosis. NAMI is the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization and cannot let hate crimes and legislation that perpetuates it be ignored.

Maryland is not the first state to propose the idea of a commission to analyze statewide hate crimes/discrimination. In California, Assembly Bill 1126 was passed in 2021 and the commission put in place protects people from employment discrimination, housing discrimination, business discrimination, etc.

All Maryland residents, especially those with mental illness, should not face discrimination at the hands of the state. Often, people dealing with mental illness are incredibly vulnerable to traumatic experiences from societal stigma to rejection from family and community members. If this bill becomes law, there will be a concrete way to address systemic bias and racism to help vulnerable communities.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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