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**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT
*SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program - Funding***

I am Celia Serkin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc. (MC Federation of Families), a family peer support organization serving diverse families in Montgomery County who have children, youth, and/or young adults with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring challenges. MC Federation of Families has been providing family peer services to families in Montgomery County for almost 20 years. Our Family Peer Specialists are parents who have raised or are currently raising children with these challenges. I am a Montgomery County resident and have two children, now adults, who have struggled since childhood with mental health challenges. My son has debilitating depression. My daughter has co-occurring challenges.

MC Federation of Families strongly supports SB 599 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program – Funding. This bill would provide level funding to the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program for the next three years to maintain critical behavioral health care services.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program was established in 2019 to build a more robust behavioral health crisis response system. These types of services provide immediate support when someone is experiencing serious emotional distress or crisis. Crisis services such as mobile crisis teams, urgent care clinics, and crisis residential beds are essential components of the behavioral health care continuum and provide an important alternative to calling 911 or going to the hospital Emergency Department.

The General Assembly mandated \$5 million for the last four years and the Behavioral Health Administration indicated that they plan to maintain it at this level for FY26. This stable funding has been used effectively to serve thousands of children and adults experiencing a crisis. It is also a smart investment that saves the state money in the long run by preventing higher hospital and criminal justice costs. Hospital EDs and the criminal justice system are not the appropriate setting to help resolve a crisis or help someone to stabilize. They are chaotic and not designed with mental health crises in mind. They are also expensive. The alternative interventions that are funded by this program must be maintained, especially considering the struggles the state continues to have with pediatric hospital overstays and lengthy ED wait times.

Children, youth, and adults experiencing a crisis have benefited from these alternative interventions. With ongoing level funding, those experiencing serious emotional distress or crisis will continue to have access to immediate support when and where they need it. Maryland already has the longest emergency room wait times in the country. Root causes are hospital capacity, a statewide behavioral health crisis, workforce shortages, health care access, and Maryland's dense population. Continued level funding of the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program will allow children, youth, and adults in crisis to have access to much needed alternative behavioral health services, thereby preventing them from having to go to the hospital and/or becoming involved in juvenile justice or the criminal justice system.

Continuing funding for the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program is a smart investment. **MC Federation of Families urges the House Appropriations Committee to pass SB 599.**