

---

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 448

### Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Self-Directed Mental Health Services – Pilot Program *Senate Finance Committee* February 11, 2025

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 448**, which will establish a self-directed mental health services pilot program in the Maryland Department of Health that would provide person-centered, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed self-directed services to Medicaid recipients in integrated care settings. The bill would require an annual allocation of \$300,000 in the FY 2027 through FY 2029 budgets. **A self-directed mental health pilot program will increase access to high-quality mental health care and promote the independence and autonomy of its participants.**

**SB 448 will empower individuals to take charge of their mental health needs.** A person-centered approach to care acknowledges an individual's strengths and their potential to actively manage and improve their health, rather than seeing them as victims of their illness or passive recipients of care.<sup>i</sup> Self-direction involves the individual in all aspects of their care and empowers them to prioritize their goals and decisions regarding their health and well-being. The self-directed model of mental health care involves person-centered goal setting and independence in choosing the goods and services that meet the individual's needs.<sup>ii</sup> **SB 448 will encourage individuals to view themselves as capable agents of change in their own lives, leading to more positive outcomes and fostering sustainable growth and resilience.**

**SB 448 will increase access to mental health care by widening both the range of mental health service models available in Maryland and the scope of individuals eligible to participate in the self-directed service model.** Currently in Maryland, self-directed services are only available under the Developmental Disabilities Administration and are not available to individuals with serious mental illness. In 2022, 30% of Marylanders who reported symptoms of anxiety and depression and who required treatment did not receive it.<sup>iii</sup> Research shows that self-directed services are successful in the treatment of serious mental illness, resulting in greater independence in housing and employment<sup>iv</sup>, as well as in overall recovery and self-esteem.<sup>v</sup> By expanding the use of self-directed services to include individuals with serious mental illness, **SB 448 will address a critical gap in mental health care accessibility and ensure that more Marylanders have the tools and support they need to thrive in their communities.**

SB 448 is an important step towards creating a more inclusive, effective, and

compassionate mental health system in Maryland, as it will increase access to care and empower individuals to play an active role in their recovery. For these reasons, **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 448.**

*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

---

<sup>i</sup> Coulter, A., & Oldham, J. (2016). Person-centred care: what is it and how do we get there? *Future Hospital Journal*, 3(2), 114–116. <https://doi.org/10.7861/futurehosp.3-2-114>

<sup>ii</sup> Mental Health Self-Direction. (n.d.). Mental Health Self-Direction. <https://www.mentalhealthselfdirection.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> Mental Health and Substance Use State Fact Sheets | KFF. (2023, March 20). KFF.

<https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/maryland>

<sup>iv</sup> Croft, B., Ísvan, N., Parish, S. L., & Mahoney, K. J. (2018). Housing and Employment Outcomes for Mental Health Self-Direction participants. *Psychiatric Services*, 69(7), 819–825. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201700057>

<sup>v</sup> Cook, J. A., Shore, S., Burke-Miller, J. K., Jonikas, J. A., Hamilton, M., Ruckdeschel, B., Norris, W., Markowitz, A. F., Ferrara, M., & Bhaumik, D. (2019). Mental Health Self-Directed Care Financing: Efficacy in improving