

March 4, 2025

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and distinguished members of the Finance Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)-Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on SB741.

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

We appreciate the need for an objective review process of criminal justice involved persons who are evaluated for competency to stand trial. People with mental health conditions are often charged with criminal offenses, due in whole or in part to mental illness symptoms. Those same symptoms can make it impossible for them to reasonably understand the charges brought by the state, or to take an active part in their own defense. When a court finds a person incompetent to stand trial, it causes a delay in the adjudication of their case, and such delays should only occur if there is an objective and fair procedure for evaluating competency. SB741 would create a process for collecting data on incompetency proceedings (§ 24-2501(G)) and require a workgroup to review that data and report to the governor and the General Assembly on the need for psychiatric beds and increased outpatient options to address competency restoration (§ 24-2501(H)-(J)). NAMI Maryland believes that reviewing competency determination data will indeed provide needed insights into the state's psychiatric bed shortage and need for more outpatient options.

SB741 also addresses the state bed shortage directly by requiring a certificate of need for any significant reduction in psychiatric beds at individual facilities and establishing a fund to increase the number of licensed psychiatric beds in the state. Any increase in the number of and appropriate use of psychiatric beds will help alleviate Maryland's rising number of people experiencing homelessness and lead to better outcomes for justice involved people living with mental health conditions.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB741.

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