

March 10, 2026

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

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 60,000 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.

Across our state, hospitals are grappling with severe pediatric psychiatric overstay and emergency department boarding pressures that leave our youth without timely access to necessary treatment. This is a crisis that leaves many vulnerable people languishing in settings that are ill-equipped to treat them.

We're seeing reductions in adolescent inpatient bed capacity. By requiring MDH to ensure the establishment of at least 24 licensed adolescent psychiatric inpatient beds in Prince George's County, this bill addresses a critical gap in our behavioral health infrastructure. These beds, providing 24-hour facility-based stabilization and treatment for youth aged 12 to 17, are essential for moving children out of emergency rooms and into appropriate clinical settings. We strongly support the bill's requirement that these beds be fully operational by December 31, 2028, and its focus on prioritizing solutions that ensure access regardless of a patient's payer source, including those on Medicaid.

While our organization advocates for increased bed capacity across the entire state, we view this legislation as a vital step in the right direction. The annual reporting requirements established by this bill, which will track bed capacity by county and identify staffing barriers, will provide the data needed to address the ongoing need to expand and strengthen the availability of behavioral health services for all Maryland children. We urge a favorable report on SB 870.

Stephanie Slowly-Little
Executive Director
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