

AMERICAN MOTHERS, INC.

Maryland Association

• Educating • Inspiring • Recognizing •



AMERICANMOTHERS®

Delores Britt-Millhouse

2026 Maryland Mother of the Year® | American Mothers, Inc.®

Healing our children and empowering our families!

Written Testimony in Support of SB 549

Strengthening Family Participation in Mental Health Treatment Planning

March 6, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Delores Britt-Millhouse. I am a resident of Legislative District 25, represented by Nick Charles, and I serve as the 2026 Maryland Mother of the Year® with American Mothers, Inc. I submit this written testimony in support of Senate Bill 549.

I would like to acknowledge Senator Charles for introducing legislation that strengthens families and promotes collaboration in mental health care. I also recognize District 25 constituent Theresa Smith, whose experience helped bring attention to the challenges families face when trying to support a loved one during mental health treatment.

Mental health challenges affect families across every community. National data shows that **1 in 5 adults in the United States experiences a mental health condition each year**, and nearly **1 in 20 adults' lives with a serious mental illness**. In Maryland, federal behavioral health surveys estimate that **more than one million adults experience a mental health condition annually**. These numbers represent families throughout our state who may one day face a mental health crisis.

As a certified Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid trainer, I teach community members how to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis, listen without judgment, and help connect individuals to appropriate professional care. In many cases, families are the first to notice when something is wrong and are the ones encouraging individuals to seek treatment.

However, once treatment begins, families can sometimes find themselves excluded from important conversations about care. Senate Bill 549 helps address this gap by ensuring individuals admitted to mental health facilities are informed, in plain language, of their right to

include trusted family members or other authorized individuals in the development and review of their treatment plans when they choose to do so.

Research consistently shows that family engagement strengthens recovery outcomes. Studies have found that when families are involved in treatment planning, individuals often experience **improved treatment adherence, fewer relapses, and reduced hospital readmissions**. Family participation also helps reinforce stability and support when individuals transition back into their communities.

This legislation does not diminish patient rights or autonomy. Instead, it reinforces patient choice while recognizing an important reality: recovery from mental health challenges is often stronger when individuals are supported by the people who know them best.

As Maryland Mother of the Year®, I have the privilege of hearing from families across our state, and their stories consistently remind me that mental health recovery is strongest when families are informed, supported, and included in the process.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 549.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours in Service,

Delores Britt-Millhouse

2026 Maryland Mother of the Year®
American Mothers, Inc.®