



Testimony on HB0676
Maryland Financial Empowerment Center Network Pilot Program - Establishment
Ways and Means Committee
February 19, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

My name is Cari Guthrie, President and CEO of Cornerstone. Since 1971, Cornerstone has offered behavioral health services to people ages 5 and up in Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and Montgomery Counties. We currently serve over 3000 clients.

Most of our clients receive SSI or SSDI benefits. We also have many clients who are employed and have that income as well. It is a huge challenge for our clients to manage such a limited amount of funds. Many of them are in debt, are unable to improve their credit and are unfamiliar with banking services. Our staff can provide general guidance such as budgeting and how to pay a bill, but they are not as well versed in saving, managing credit and other skills that would be helpful.

Financial stability impacts our client's ability to become more independent and lower need for entitlements – which is certainly the goal. It affects housing, employment and even health outcomes. If someone does not have a stable home, it is unlikely that they will be able to stop using drugs, take their medications consistently, or maintain a job. This could mean that they end up in the hospital because their diabetes acts up or they have a psychiatric crisis. It could mean that they end up in jail because they are on the street. It could decrease their chances of finding a job because they have no place to shower and keep clean clothes for interviews or employment. Financial stability and lifting people out of poverty is key to improving quality of life.

Financial Empowerment Centers would be an amazing resource for the people we serve as well as others in the community. I'm sure you are aware of the success of the Center in Gaithersburg. For the past 3 years it has demonstrated significant impact on the community, helping residents increase their savings by more than half a million dollars and decrease their debt by almost \$2 million dollars.

Cornerstone's mission is to empower people with behavioral health disorders to thrive in their community through collaboration, treatment, education, and advocacy. We are bearers of hope, committing to helping them live a life of their choosing. Approving HB0676 is an obvious next step to provide these effective services across the State of Maryland so that all residents, including those with disabilities, can have the opportunity to build financial stability, be productive members of their community, and have a quality life of their choosing. Please vote in favor of HB0676.

Thank you.