

Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition

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May 21, 2020

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

Thank you for your strong leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with the Department of Health, you have taken wise steps to curtail the spread of the virus and promote the safety of Marylanders. In addition, the quick efforts of your administration to relax regulations to ensure that people with behavioral health needs continue to have access to treatment during this crisis have made a tremendous difference in the lives of many who need help for mental health or substance use disorders. **We write to ask that your administration continue to support individuals with behavioral health needs by preserving the funding of the Behavioral Health Administration in the FY21 budget.**

We must anticipate the tremendous demand for behavioral health services that will ensue from the COVID-19 pandemic. An extensive body of literature documents the lasting effects of traumatic events – whether they be hurricanes, earthquakes, acts of terrorism, military conflicts or public health crises – on the behavioral health of populations. The anxiety and fear associated with the spread of COVID-19, the high rate of infection and fatalities, the uncertainty of the duration of the crisis, the stress caused by job loss and economic insecurity, the disruption to routines and the consequences of practicing social distancing all contribute to anxiety disorders, depression and increased substance use.

Ensuring access to behavioral treatment and supports will be a critical aspect of Maryland's recovery from COVID-19. The state needs to be prepared for an upsurge and continued high level of demand. While we are aware of the likely need for significant budget cuts in FY21, reductions in the Behavioral Health Administration's budget – including to the planned provider rate increase – will be counter-productive. Lack of access to community-based treatment, services and supports will result in an increase in demand for high-cost care – including emergency room visits and hospitalizations for individuals of all ages, and out-of-home residential placements for children – in addition to the human cost.

Maryland's public behavioral health system is comprised of a network of programs and services that are financed through a combination of state general funds and Medicaid. A number of grant-funded services complement the treatment services that are covered by the fee-for-service system. They are critical components of our state's behavioral health system of care and must be preserved. Peer support services, including the state's network of Wellness and Recovery Centers, provide a variety of recovery-oriented services to support individuals with mental health or substance use disorders within their communities. Family peer support and navigation services help to link families to treatment resources and other supports for their child or other loved one with a behavioral health disorder. Clubhouses offer adolescents with substance use challenges support

and connection. School-based mental health services and crisis services are funded through a combination of Medicaid and state general funds. All of these programs work together to support individuals of all ages with mental health or substance use disorders to be treated and supported in the community.

As you are making difficult decisions about Maryland's FY21 budget, please keep in mind the tremendous demand there will be for behavioral health services and preserve funding for the Behavioral Health Administration.

Sincerely,

Adventist HealthCare
Baltimore City Substance Abuse Directorate
Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc.
Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition
Baltimore Jewish Council
Bay Life Services School Based Mental Health Program
Behavioral Health Coalition of the Eastern Shore
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
Brain Injury Association of Maryland
Catholic Charities of Baltimore
Chesapeake Voyagers
Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland
Cornerstone Montgomery
Disability Rights Maryland
EveryMind
HARBEL Community Organization
Health Care for the Homeless
Healthy Harford
Institutes for Behavior Resources
Jewish Community Services
Key Point Health Services
Legal Action Center
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland
Lower Shore Friends
Maryland Addiction Directors Council
Maryland Association of Behavioral Health Authorities
Maryland Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence
Maryland Clinical Social Work Coalition
Maryland Coalition of Families
Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging
Maryland-DC Society of Addiction Medicine
Maryland Psychiatric Society
Mental Health Association of Maryland
Mid Shore Behavioral Health
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Maryland
Office of Consumer Advocates
On Our Own of Anne Arundel County
On Our Own of Carroll County
On Our Own of Maryland
On Our Own of St. Mary's County
Sheppard Pratt

cc. Robert R. Neall, Secretary, Maryland Department of Health
David R. Brinkley, Secretary, Maryland Department of Budget and Management
Dr. Aliya Jones, Deputy Secretary, Behavioral Health Administration
Diane M. Croghan, Deputy Chief of Staff, Governor's Office