

**Senate Bill 789 Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee  
(Suicide Mortality Review and Prevention Act of 2020)**

Finance Committee

March 4, 2020

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 789.

SB 789 establishes a Suicide Fatality Review Committee to identify and address factors contributing to suicide deaths in the state and facilitate system changes to prevent suicide deaths.

In Maryland, the number of suicide deaths increased from 474 to 630 between 2000 and 2017, representing a 33% increase. Maryland veterans account for 18% of all suicide deaths in the state. Among African American children aged 5 to 11 years, the suicide rate has increased and is steadily rising,<sup>1</sup> and it is now the second-leading cause of death for black youth aged 10 to 19.<sup>2</sup> There lacks a process to confidentially investigate or share information related to suicide deaths, which impacts prevention efforts to reduce these deaths.

The aforementioned statistics show that suicide rates are increasing among various populations and are not slowing down. SB 789 bill expands the surveillance and investigation of all suicide deaths by convening a stakeholder group to review suicide deaths occurring in the State and to develop strategies to prevent them. This bill aligns with the national campaign coordinated by the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General to recommend that each state establish a suicide mortality review committee to monitor and institute changes to decrease suicide mortality.

Given the severity of the situation, it is necessary to bring together key stakeholders to allow for confidential identification, investigation, and dissemination of information to reduce suicide. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 789 and urges a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.samhsa.gov/2019/07/23/alarmed-suicide-trends-in-african-american-children-an-urgent-issue>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/suicide-rate-rising-fast-black-youth-report-finds-n1103956>