

**Senate Bill 550 Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for
Service Members and Veterans – Establishment**

Finance Committee

February 23, 2021

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 550.

SB 550 would establish a Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Health to support local behavioral health programs for service members, veterans, and their families.

Statistics related to the prevalence of mental health disorders among U.S. veterans are startling. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Approximately 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for mental health conditions seek it, but only half who receive treatment receive adequate care.

Of particular concern is the high rate of veteran suicide:

- Veterans account for 18 percent of all suicide deaths among U.S. adults
- Veteran suicides in Maryland have risen over the last several years, with 91 deaths by suicide in 2018.
- Between 2014 and 2018, approximately 392 Veterans completed suicide in Maryland.

In 2020, it was projected that 362,000 veterans would call Maryland home¹, and in 2017, a total of 47,484 active duty serviceman and reserve members were reported to reside in Maryland². It is essential that we ensure these individuals and their families have access to behavioral health services as needed.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 550 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://veterans.maryland.gov/2019-maryland-veteran-population-map/>

² <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/public-workforce-salaries/military-civilian-active-duty-employee-workforce-numbers-by-state.html>

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