

**House Bill 903 Task Force to Study the Maryland Public Guardianship Program**

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 18, 2021

**Position: Support**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. MHAMD supports HB 903 with the amendment that a representative from the Department of Human Services also sit on this Task Force.

HB 903 seeks to establish the Task Force to Study the Maryland Public Guardianship Program, and requires the Task Force to assess and analyze the Maryland Public Guardianship Program and make recommendations about how to improve the guardianship program in Maryland.

Maryland's public guardianship program guides the care of hundreds of vulnerable adults, many with dementia, mental illness and substance use disorders. Individuals with behavioral health disorders represent a disproportionate number of those in the overall program and they tend to be in the program for many years.

In some jurisdictions, the ratio of case managers to guardianship program participants can be extremely high. In Baltimore City for example, one case manager can have as many as 60 individuals for whom they must oversee care and meet needs that arise. Cases can be complex and often require time far beyond one worker serving such a high case load, and the burden on these case managers is heavy, hence turnover is high. This also may result in the needs of guardianship program participants to be overlooked or unmet.

HB 903 would compare the practices of local Area Agencies on Aging relating to the Maryland Public Guardianship Program, analyze and compare the laws and practices of other states relating to public guardianship programs, examine any other research, analysis, or guidance related to the best practices of public guardianship programs, and make recommendations to improve the Maryland Public Guardianship Program. MHAMD believes that this is a much needed priority for our state to evaluate best practices and work toward improving our over-burdened public guardianship program.

The Mental Health Association of Maryland supports the goals and intents of this bill and urges a favorable report on House Bill 903 with the proposed technical amendment.

*For more information contact:*

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