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House Bill 935
Health and Health Insurance - Behavioral Health Services - Expansion (Behavioral Health System Modernization Act)

House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 9, 2022

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Volunteers of America Chesapeake & Carolinas (VOACC) in Lanham, MD offers the VOA Hope Center, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) currently serving the mental health and substance use treatment needs of our community. As constituents and as behavioral health services providers, we urge you to pass the above cited Behavioral Health System Modernization Act. This legislation would ensure nationally recognized certification and sustainable treatment reimbursements for existing CCBHCs, and give mental health and substance use treatment organizations throughout our State the option of becoming a CCBHC – something every community needs and deserves. We need you, our state legislators, to enable Maryland to join the growing list of 40 states that have already certified 430+ CCBHCs, ensuring access to integrated, cost-effective community-based care to meet the escalating demand for behavioral healthcare.

As a CCBHC grantee funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) from 2020-2022, VOACC is implementing the CCBHC model for mental health treatment and substance use disorder services, often avoiding far costlier services in emergency rooms, hospitals, and long-term residential treatment. Since 2019, the VOA Hope Center has been serving the most vulnerable adults and children with physical and complex mental health issues through our Greenbelt office in Prince George's County and our Woodlawn office in Baltimore County. As a CARF-accredited health and human services nonprofit, we have been providing human services to Maryland's most vulnerable since 1896 and specifically behavioral health and substance use recovery services since 1992. SAMHSA's investment in the VOA Hope Center in 2020 has increased our ability to:

- Expand access to state-of-the-art care for consumers through telehealth, and emphasize services for children and families, older adults, and veterans – populations that are particularly underserved.
- Increase partnerships with community organizations to provide coordinated care, including crisis intervention and treatment. We are collaborating, coordinating, or sharing resources through formal relationships with 18 community organizations, including those aimed at crisis intervention and mitigation.
- Grow the behavioral health workforce in Maryland communities at a time when that workforce is in high demand, while strengthening our workforce capacity and capabilities to

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deliver clinical best practices.

- Improve our infrastructure and service delivery models. We now offer seven services for serious mental illness, serious emotional disturbance, long-term chronic addiction, mild or moderate mental illness, substance use disorders, complex health profiles, and medication-assisted treatment to provide a “whole-person” approach to the treatment of substance use disorders including opioids.
- Integrate behavioral and physical health, along with important social determinants of health such as housing, food, reentry, and employment services for our consumers to address their full range of needs.

Despite the pandemic, in less than two years of operation under the SAMHSA grant, the VOA Hope Center has already made a difference. Despite immeasurable obstacles, our clients have made gains in six important psychosocial and health metrics:

Outcome Measure	Average Rate of Improvement Per Client
1. Improvement in overall health	30%
2. Improved functioning in everyday life	10%
3. Reduced serious psychological distress	16%
4. No use of illegal substances in past 30 days	10%
5. Improved housing stability	15%
6. Improved ability to remain in the community (despite behavioral health challenges)	10%

As we continue to serve, we face long-term sustainability challenges beyond our two-year grant period. Supported by the Behavioral Health System Modernization Act, our CCBHC will be able to continue providing proven mental health and substance use services to vulnerable individuals in Maryland. Should you have any questions, please contact Dr. Sheryl Neverson, Vice President of VOACC’s Maryland Programs, at your convenience at 240.784.7187 or sneverson@voaches.org.

Sincerely,

Russell Snyder
President & CEO, Volunteers of America Chesapeake & Carolinas