



MID-ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

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TO: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Nicholas R. Kipke

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 9, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 605 – *Veterans – Behavioral Health Services – Mental Health First Aid*

On behalf of the Maryland State Medical Society and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers, we submit this letter of **support** for House Bill 605.

House Bill 605 includes “Mental Health First Aid” in the services Maryland’s Department of Health (MDH) is required to coordinate with the Veteran’s Administration. “Mental Health First Aid” is defined as training for veterans and the immediate family members of veterans on how to identify and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders.

Under current law, subject to the limitations of the State budget, MDH, in collaboration with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, the Maryland National Guard, and the Maryland Defense Force, provides behavioral health service coordination for veterans in Maryland in order to connect them to behavioral health services which may be available through the VA. If behavioral health services are not available or accessible through the VA, MDH is to provide service coordination for veterans to connect them to behavioral health services which may be available through the Behavioral Health Administration, until such federal services can be accessed and obtained.

It is well recognized that veterans often face significant behavioral health issues that are often triggered by their experiences while serving. While it is critically important that veterans have access to the full range of behavioral health services, often veterans and their families do not recognize their behavioral health needs and/or are not knowledgeable on how to respond to mental health and substance abuse challenges or access services. Incorporating “Mental Health First Aid” training into the services veterans and their families in Maryland are entitled to receive will greatly enhance the likelihood they will identify their behavioral health challenges and access needed services.

House Bill 605 is a straightforward and needed expansion of the services our veterans deserve that if implemented should greatly enhance veterans and their families’ ability to access needed behavioral health services. A favorable report is requested.

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