

HB 408 Mental Health Law - County Mental Health Advisory Committees - Membership
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 14, 2024
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) 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 and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 408.

HB 408 requires that each local mental health advisory committee include among its membership an individual serving in the military or an individual with experience with mental health care for veterans.

The Maryland General Assembly established county mental health advisory committees (MHAC) to “serve as advocate[s] for a comprehensive mental health system for persons of all ages.” *Md. Code Ann., Health-General § 10-308*. In performing this duty, it is essential that the MHACs take into consideration the unique needs and perspectives of various populations, including active-duty military personnel, veterans, and their families.

Representation from this population is particularly important given the high prevalence of behavioral health concerns among veterans and active-duty military members:

- In 2021, suicide was the second-leading cause of death among veterans under 45.¹
- There were 6,392 veteran suicide deaths in 2021, 114 more than in 2020.²
- There were 89 Maryland veteran suicide deaths in 2021.³

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Maryland is home to approximately 350,000 veterans, 30,000 active-duty service members and 18,000 reservists/national guard members. We must ensure MHACs have the information and perspective necessary to address the needs of this population. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 408 and urges a favorable report.

¹ https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

² https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

³ <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-State-Data-Sheet-Maryland-508.pdf>