

**SB 129 – Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity –
Advisory Committee and Hospital Reporting**
Senate Finance Committee
January 30, 2025
Position: FAVORABLE

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 SB 129.

SB 129 would establish a health equity measures advisory committee that would identify health disparities, including behavioral health disparities, that adversely impact disadvantaged groups, and require hospitals licensed by Maryland to annually submit health equity reports that include strategies to reduce disparities.

Despite ongoing attempts to address the problem, recent data shows that significant disparities in behavioral health equity remain.¹

Among the Black/African American population, while 21% reported having a mental illness, just 39% reported receiving mental health services (compared to 52% of non-Hispanic whites who reported having a mental illness). The percentage of Hispanic and Latino people who reported receiving treatment was even lower, at 17%. Barriers to getting help include stigma, mistrust of the health care system, and a shortage of providers from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Regarding overall incidence of behavioral health conditions, the LGBTQ+ population has a higher prevalence of mental health and substance use issues. For example, among LGBTQ youth, 1/3 of females had serious thoughts of suicide, and males were five times more likely than straight youth to have had serious thoughts of suicide, and nine times more likely to have made a suicide attempt. Transgender individuals were almost twice as likely to have a mental illness, and over 1 ½ times more likely to have a substance use disorder, than the cisgender population.

The data indicates that continued efforts must be made to address disparities in behavioral health equity. SB 129 would serve to both better identify existing disparities and develop solutions. For this reason, MHAMD urges a favorable report.

¹ SAMHSA. Diverse and Underserved Communities. [Diverse and Underserved Communities | SAMHSA](#)