

**SB 988 Maryland Medical Assistance Program -
Self-Directed Mental Health Services - Pilot Program**

Finance Committee

March 8, 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 Senate Bill 988.

SB 988 establishes a self-directed mental health services (SDMHS) pilot program that will provide a range of person-centered and self-directed services and supports to 100 adult Medicaid recipients whose needs have not been met by the public behavioral health system. The bill specifies that when selecting program participants, priority will be given to individuals who have multiple disabilities, including severe mental illness and trauma-related disorders, who have been excluded from or unsuccessful in assertive community treatment programs and are at a risk for institutionalization.

The SDMHS model is gaining recognition as a strategy that can help people with mental illness avoid the cycle of hospitalization and achieve better outcomes. It is an approach to organizing publicly funded services and supports for people with serious mental health conditions that goes beyond typical medical interventions and instead focuses on recovery, helping foster resilience, stability, and autonomy. It involves people controlling an individualized budget, choosing from a much broader-than-usual range of goods, services, and supports to overcome challenges and reach personal and professional goals. The model has already been successfully implemented in several states across the country, including Florida, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Utah.

The self-directed care model is not new to Maryland. In fact, it is available already to individuals living with developmental disabilities (see [Md. Code Annotated, Health-General Article §7-408, et seq.](#)). Unfortunately, Maryland statute **explicitly excludes** individuals with mental illness from availing themselves of these services (see [Md. Code Annotated, Health-General Article §7-403](#)).

Self-directed care is an integrated care model that promotes self-determination and consumer choice. It has been demonstrated to improve behavioral health, somatic health, vocational and housing outcomes, and reduce institutionalization. This proven model should be available to Marylanders living with mental illness just as it is to Marylanders living with developmental disabilities. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 988 and urges a favorable report.

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