



NAMI Maryland Weekly Legislative Update, February 1, 2021

The largely virtual legislative session continues apace. Legislators have introduced nearly 1600 bills and there are many issues focusing on addressing mental health - including additional funding. Last week, Governor Hogan introduced the RELIEF Act that will provide assistance to Maryland families and businesses impacted by the pandemic, and the State Senate has moved to include additional funding. The RELIEF Act includes direct payments to Maryland families, support for students and schools, small businesses, and an additional \$20 million in funding for crisis services, a move strongly supported by NAMI Maryland. The package is advancing through the Senate and will be heard in the House next week.

This Week's Bill Hearings

NAMI Maryland is leading the advocacy on [HB 108/SB 286](#), legislation that builds on the existing Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program by:

- Increasing funding for the program to \$10,000,000 per year and ensuring consistent funding thereafter.
- Promoting mobile crisis teams that:
 - Minimize the role of law enforcement in crisis interactions
 - Are culturally competent
 - Work with their local communities to evaluate and trouble shoot service delivery issues, in part by engaging with local advocacy groups, and
 - Following stabilization, ensure that individuals have appropriate follow up care and support utilizing peers.

[HB 496](#) Currently, there is a School Resource Officer (law enforcement) in every school in Maryland. However, not every school has a counselor, social worker, or other staff who provide mental health supports to students. This legislation invests in better school-based mental health services and reduces the presence of law enforcement in our public schools.

[SB 168](#)/HB 209 (Eckardt/Belcastro) This legislation creates a statewide program to review suicide deaths among persons and to develop strategies for suicide prevention. These most recent findings suggest changing suicide trends during the pandemic. Among Black residents, suicide mortality appeared to double when compared with previous years, and suicide is still the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults. Maryland needs to do more on prevention, outreach, and engagement. To do that effectively, we need timely data to help local jurisdictions drive prevention efforts.

Legislation focused on health equity and eliminating racial disparities include [HB 28/SB 005](#) (Pena-Melnyk/Griffith), a bill to require Maryland to provide timely information so we can better address health disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought these issues to the forefront. Racial and ethnic minorities are at greater health risks and without better information, we cannot target state resources to the communities that need them most.

[HB 78/SB 52](#) (Pena-Melnyk/Washington) The Maryland Commission on Health Equity would be established through this bill to address racial injustice and health disparity issues in Maryland. Utilizing a public health equity framework, the Commission will address the gaps in services and resources that contribute to racial health disparities.

Legislative programming note: While the virtual session makes it easier for people to participate, there are significant changes in process and new deadlines for witness sign up and testimony submission. Testimony is due no later than 3:00 pm 2 business days prior to a bill hearing and verbal testimony is limited. Please contact us for help signing up and for more information. If there are bill hearings you'd like to watch, visit the MGA's meeting page and locate the correct day and committee to stream a bill hearing at home:
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Meetings/Day>.

Important Dates:

- We strongly urge you to attend our [Advocacy Day Training Webinar on Monday, February 15th, 2021](#). The structure of Advocacy Day is very different from what we normally do and we want to make sure NAMI advocates are prepared.
- Don't forget to register for our [Virtual Advocacy Day on February 18th, 2021](#)! Advocacy Day will look very different this year and it is important that you sign-up early. Talking points, meeting background, and relevant bills will be sent out to everyone on Friday, February 12th, 2021.