



September 15, 2020

The Honorable Kristerfer Burnett, Chair
Members, Health Committee
Baltimore City Council
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: Council Bill 20-0199R- Investigative Hearing- Well-being of the Transgender Community in Baltimore

Dear Chair Burnett and Members of the Committee:

On February 24, 2020 the Baltimore City Council introduced City Council Resolution 20-0199R requesting that Behavioral Health System (BHSB) Baltimore along with various City agencies update the Council on services provided to and the general well-being of the transgender community in Baltimore.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a non-profit organization that manages and oversees the city's continuum of behavioral health prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery support services within the public behavioral health system. BHSB has a unique role within the public behavioral health system (PBHS), as the lead entity responsible for ensuring there is coordination and connections to other public service systems—like law enforcement, courts, and schools—to promote access to behavioral health care and address social determinants of health.

The PBHS services are largely reimbursed through the state-administered Medicaid program. BHSB funds to a range of behavioral health services that are not reimbursable by Medicaid and health insurance. In FY 2019 BHSB awarded \$42 million in grant funds through 353 contracts for services that are not reimbursable through the PBHS.

LGBTQIA+ Peer Support Services

In FY 2020, BHSB provided \$139,670 in funding for Hearts and Ears, which is a peer-led non-profit wellness and recovery center for LGBTQIA+ individuals with behavioral health needs. They operate 32 hours a week, providing weekly peer support groups and referral services for mental health and substance use disorders. Hearts and Ears provides a safe and inclusive environment for providing care to people with shared identities and experiences.

Here2Help Hotline

Baltimore City operates a 24/7 Here2Help Hotline, 410-433-5175, to assist people to connect to mental health and substance use services in Baltimore City. The hotline receives over 40,000 calls annually and is able to refer people for LGBTQIA+ services.



Training and Technical Assistance

BHSB recognizes that a person seeking behavioral health services is more likely to remain engaged in behavioral health care if the provider is welcoming and affirming of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In FY 2020 BHSB worked with a consulting firm to provide the Sexuality and Gender Training Program to behavioral health providers that serve residents in Baltimore City. This program provided training and technical assistance to build providers' capacity to serve people of all genders and sexual orientations in a culturally competent and affirming manner.

The pervasive stigma and recent violence toward the LGBTQIA+ community in Baltimore City is an ongoing challenge and creates a barrier to access to care for this community, which is harmful to the overall health of LGBTQIA+ individuals and public health of Baltimore City. BHSB remains committed to working with the City Council to support behavioral health and wellness needs of the LGBTQIA+ community in Baltimore City.

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