

<b>FROM</b>	NAME & TITLE	Tisha Edwards, Director	CITY of BALTIMORE <b>MEMO</b>	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success		
	SUBJECT	City Council Resolution 21-0044R – Informational Hearing - COVID-19 and Mental Health		

DATE:

**TO**

The Honorable President and  
 Members of the City Council  
 City Hall, Room 400

May 17, 2021

**Position: Favorable**

The Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success (MOCFS) has been asked to respond to City Council Resolution 21-0044R introduced by Councilmembers McCray, Cohen, Ramos, Bullock, Middleton, Glover, Burnett, Torrence, and Stokes.

**Background**

This Resolution calls for an informational hearing to discuss: the financial, physical, and social impacts that COVID-19 has had on the mental health of Baltimore City residents and what resources are available to help people cope and recover from this trauma.

Youth have faced a change in routine, support system, and social interaction. These changes have led to an increase in depression and anxiety.

- Nationally, children have shown an increased need for emergency mental health services with a 24% increase in need for psychiatric hospitalization for youth ages 5-11 years of age and a 31% increase for youth 12-17.<sup>1</sup>
- Suicide rates and attempts have also increased for youth ages 10-24 with social isolation being one of the highest risk factors related to suicide.<sup>2</sup>

The adults caring for our children are also facing unprecedented increases in mental health needs:

- One in three people in Maryland state that the pandemic has left them feeling depressed and anxious.<sup>3</sup>
- Behavioral health providers reported that 89% of clients are accessing services for anxiety and 79% are accessing services due to loneliness and social isolation.<sup>4</sup>
- Here in Baltimore we have seen drastic spikes in calls to the Baltimore Crisis hotline. In the beginning of the pandemic, the crisis hotline received approximately 2800 calls per month, that increased to 5700 calls by July of 2020. Not only were people calling the crisis hotline but the severity of the risk increased as well. Prior to the pandemic, calls regarding suicide were about 75 and that has now soared to 380.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/02/02/962060105/child-psychiatrists-warn-that-the-pandemic-may-be-driving-up-kids-suicide-risk>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bha.health.maryland.gov/Documents/COVID%20Survey%20Results%20BHA%20PPT%207.7.20.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bha.health.maryland.gov/Documents/COVID%20Survey%20Results%20BHA%20PPT%207.7.20.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bs-hs-mental-health-covid-20200929-yzjfdfc2ijb4vab7o3v4g7q25a-story.html>

Most children who need mental health services don't receive the care they need.<sup>6</sup> Youth need services and we must make these services easily available, affordable, and equitable. We need to recognize that the numbers stated above may be an underestimate. Once youth return to school in the fall full time we may see these rates increase even more due to an increase in expectations in school and observations by professionals outside of the home. We as a city must prepare to offer not only supports for youth in need but also social emotional healing services to prevent long-term effects of the pandemic to youth throughout Baltimore City.

Even before the pandemic, MOCFS has been actively engaged in expanding our city's understanding and implementation of trauma-informed care. Our office strongly supported the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act and has provided staff support to establish the Trauma-Informed Care Task Force. The Baltimore Children's Cabinet also has a dedicated priority & workgroup for Trauma-Informed Care.

In the midst of the past year's experiences with COVID-19, initiatives within MOCFS have deepened their commitment to expansion of trauma-informed care. The Baltimore Children's Cabinet 2021 Action Plan includes the development of a youth-led media campaign to decrease stigma around mental health & raise awareness of mental health services. In partnership with the Healing Youth Alliance & Wide Angle Youth Media, development of content for the media campaign is currently underway. The Children's Cabinet 2021 Action Plan also prioritized expansion of screening for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Our office and members of the Trauma-Informed Care workgroup advocated for state legislation that created a commission that would in part explore the incorporation of ACEs screenings in routine health care, such as annual pediatrician visits.

In response to the exacerbation of toxic stress among families and staff at the Head Start centers managed within MOCFS, we released an RFP that seeks trauma-informed care providers to support the social, emotional and mental health of children, families and staff as they return to in-person services in the fall. These programs are seeking a partner to develop a comprehensive trauma informed menu of services designed to assist families and staff as we re-open for in-person operation.

MOCFS continues to work closely with partners who are often at the front lines of engaging with the city's youth. The Family League of Baltimore recently released an RFA that seeks youth-serving organizations, and providing trauma-informed care is among its prioritized goals. We also support the Baltimore City Public Schools' efforts and ongoing focus on student wholeness. MOCFS advocated for the additional resources that will come from the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to increase the presence of Community School Coordinators and health care practitioners at each school, building on the current efforts of the Expanded School Mental Health program. MOCFS is encouraged that the community and family engagement around schools reopening plans includes a component focused on student wholeness. The district leadership is seeking family input about where to prioritize student supports – social & emotional learning, student mental health, school culture & climate, arts & enrichment, or athletics. This approach reflects an understanding that a broad set of strategies will be needed to address the increased trauma and disconnection that students have experienced in the past year.

MOCFS is proud of its partnership with a number of community-based organizations, which are continuing and growing their great work in the area of mental health services for young people –

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-03-04/childrens-mental-health-crisis-could-be-a-next-wave-in-the-pandemic>

Black Mental Health Alliance, Centro Sol, Healing Youth Alliance, Holistic Life Foundation, among others.

## **Conclusion**

The Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success strongly supports the City's focus and engagement in efforts to effectively address the trauma experienced by our children and families, both preceding the COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbated by the past year's experiences of isolation and instability.

**The Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success thanks the Health, Environment, & Technology Committee for the opportunity to respond to Council Resolution 21-0044R and stands ready to answer any questions the committee may have.**

cc: Natasha Mehu  
Nina Themelis