



Danna E. Mauch, PhD
President and CEO

Ambassador (ret.) Barry B. White
Chairperson of MAMH Board of Directors

June 6, 2023

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways & Means
24 Beacon Street, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Ways & Means
24 Beacon Street, Room 208
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Patrick O'Connor
Ranking Minority Member
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
24 Beacon Street, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Vice Chair Friedman, The Honorable Patrick O'Connor, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Re: MAMH Support for Behavioral Health Priorities in the FY24 Budget

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH), thank you for your ongoing leadership in addressing the needs of people with behavioral health conditions and their families. We are thrilled that the Senate FY24 budget is so strong for behavioral health, including new resources for expansion of housing supports, emergency department (ED) diversionary programs, mental health services in schools, and implementation of parity. These dollars are particularly timely as we continue to experience an unprecedented behavioral health crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are so grateful for the Senate's strong commitment, strategic vision, hard work, and exceptional action to advance positive behavioral health and wellness.

As you engage in the work of the Conference Committee process, we write to urge you to maintain in the final FY24 state budget the following provisions to address the behavioral health needs of people across the Commonwealth **which were included in the Senate (S.2400) FY24 budget bill:**

- **\$19M for the Department of Mental Health (DMH) Adult Emergency Room (ER) Diversion Initiative (DMH 5046-0000)**
To create or expand respite programs that will support individuals in transitioning out of ERs and back into the community, as well as divert individuals from ERs and unnecessary hospitalization in the first place.
- **\$4M increase for the DMH Rental Subsidy Program (DHCD 7004-9033)**
To address the increased need for rental assistance among individuals with severe and disabling mental health conditions, as evident by the significant number of people "stuck" in hospitals, ERs, and nursing

homes. Rental assistance allows individuals to thrive in community with tenancy and clinical services, and it provides critical supports to help people engage in treatment and achieve recovery.

- **\$3M increase for the Safe Haven Program (DMH 5046-2000)**
To establish six new Safe Havens across the state. Safe Haven programs provide transitional and supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals with multiple disabilities who are not well served by the traditional shelter system, usually due to histories of trauma.
- **\$1.275M for a statewide School-Based Behavioral Health Technical Assistance Center (DMH 5042-5000)**
To support the statewide launch of the school-based behavioral health technical assistance center, which assists school districts and partnering community providers to build and sustain capacity to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral health needs of K-12 students. Currently, the center is primarily providing technical assistance in Western Mass. This request also includes \$75,000 for MAMH to conduct an environmental scan of K-12 mental health education initiatives and to align the identified curricular resources with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework.
- **\$1.25M for the Middlesex County Restoration Center (EOHHS 4000-0300)**
To pilot a center that will expand community capacity for mental health and substance use treatment and support ongoing law enforcement diversionary efforts across New England’s most populous county.
- **\$300K for the Refugee Health Promotion Program to expand mental health and wellness programming (ORI 4003-0122)**
To provide additional resources to community-based organizations contracted with the Office of Refugees and Immigrants to provide additional behavioral health programming to their refugee communities.
- **\$250K for the Division of Insurance (DOI) to implement the parity requirements in the new mental health omnibus law, Chapter 177 of the Acts of 2022 (DOI 7006-0029)**
To enable the DOI to expand the capacity of its Health Care Access Bureau to enforce the parity provisions in Chapter 177 of the Acts of 2022 by hiring staff, investigating, and adjudicating consumer and provider parity complaints, and conducting market conduct exams and other activities.
- **\$192M in appropriations for the Behavioral Health Trust Fund (4000-0054)**
To appropriate federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, 42 U.S.C. 802(c) (“ARPA”) dollars for the purpose of “addressing barriers to the delivery of an equitable, culturally-competent, affordable and clinically-appropriate continuum of behavioral health care and services.” These appropriations are consistent with the [recommendations](#) put forth by the Behavioral Health Advisory Commission.

We also urge you to include in the final budget these provisions, which were included in the **House (H.3901) FY24 budget bill**:

- **\$8.89M, a \$2.5M increase in funding for the Home and Healthy for Good Permanent Supportive Housing Program (DHCD 7004-0104)**
To expand this program that places persons experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness into low-threshold, permanent housing with supportive services. The program’s flexible funding can be used to leverage local, state, and federal resources.
- **\$11M, a \$2M increase over the base budget funding in FY23, for the Massachusetts Jail/Arrest Diversion Initiative (DMH 5046-0000 Adult Mental Health and Support Services)**

To provide grants to local communities and behavioral health providers to improve outcomes for individuals when they encounter police and other first responders during a behavioral health crisis. In FY20, DMH expended \$3,915,661 on 61 grants to cities and towns across the state ranging from \$7,500 to \$298,000. With an additional \$2M, DMH could increase funding to current grantees that wish to expand diversion services or award funds to new grantees committing to the diversion of people with behavioral health conditions.

Thank you so much for your consideration. If we can provide additional information on any of these amendments, please do not hesitate to reach out to me (dannamauch@mamh.org), Jennifer Honig (jenniferhonig@mamh.org), or Jessica Larochelle (jessicalarochelle@mamh.org).

Sincerely,



Danna Mauch, Ph.D.
President and CEO

- c: The Honorable Karen Spilka, President, Massachusetts Senate
- The Honorable Jo Comerford, Assistant Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
- The Honorable John Velis, Chair, Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery
- The Honorable Julian Cyr, Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
- The Honorable James Eldridge
- The Honorable Pavel Payano
- Christopher Marino, Budget Director, Senate Ways and Means
- Tovah Miller, Associate Counsel, Senate Ways and Means
- Olivia Bryan, Fiscal Policy Analyst, Senate Ways and Means
- Nicholas Hoffman, Fiscal Policy Analyst, Senate Ways and Means