



Danna E. Mauch, PhD

President and CEO
Directors

Ambassador (ret.) Barry B. White

Chairperson of MAMH Board of

November 3, 2023

The Honorable Julian Cyr
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
24 Beacon Street, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Marjorie Decker
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
24 Beacon Street, Room 130
Boston, MA 02133

Submitted to JointCommittee.PublicHealth@malegislature.gov

Dear Chair Cyr, Chair Decker, and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Health:

Re: Testimony in support of S.1434, An Act establishing the human service transportation (HST) consumer advisory board

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH), I am writing to respectfully submit this testimony in support of the above-referenced bill, heard by your Committee on September 20, 2023.

Formed over a century ago, MAMH is dedicated to promoting mental health and wellbeing, while preventing behavioral health conditions and associated disability. We are committed to advancing prevention, early intervention, effective treatment, and research for people of all ages. We seek to eliminate stigma and discrimination and advance full inclusion in all aspects of community life. This includes discrimination affecting not only people with behavioral health conditions, but also people who face unequal burdens and barriers to the protections and benefits of citizenship due to their race, ethnicity, gender identity, or disability status. MAMH has a demonstrated track record of furthering its mission by convening stakeholders across the behavioral health and public health communities; disseminating emerging knowledge; and providing subject matter expertise to inform public policy, service delivery, and payment methodologies.

S. 1434 would establish a Human Services Transportation consumer advisory board within the department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This board would have a mandate to improve the quality, reliability, and safety of non-emergency transportation to medical, community, and other health and human services for people with disabilities across the commonwealth. MAMH is providing

support for this vital bill because it will greatly improve the transportation experience of individuals with mental health conditions.

For many individuals with mental health conditions, the road to recovery is not just about therapeutic interventions; it is also about ensuring that they can reach these interventions reliably. Non-emergency transportation to medical, community, and other essential services is a lifeline, helping people remain engaged with their communities, maintain their well-being, and live with dignity. When transportation to such services is not available, mental health can soon be compromised. For example, missing a therapy session due to transportation challenges can have an adverse effect on mental well being.

The bill's aim to improve the quality of non-emergency transportation, while identifying challenges and working towards solutions, is laudable. It is important to realize that transportation is not just about vehicles and routes; it's also about the people who use these services and the unique needs that they have. The actions that the board would take, including eliciting consumer experiences, holding public meetings, and organizing consumer listening sessions, would guarantee a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the voices of those most affected.

We are especially appreciative of the inclusion of a representative on the board that we at MAMH would recommend. Furthermore, the requirements for remote public meetings, consumer listening sessions, and annual reporting detailing recommendations demonstrate a dedication to transparency and accountability.

This legislation represents a significant step towards a more inclusive and responsive transportation system for all, especially those with disabilities, including mental health conditions. We urge the Joint Committee on Public Health to report this bill out of committee favorably, giving individuals with mental health issues the assurance that their voices matter and that their well-being is a priority.

Thank you for your consideration. If we can provide any additional information regarding this bill, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danna Mauch".

Danna Mauch, PhD
President and CEO

c: Senator Susan Moran