

## NAMI Maryland 2016 Advocacy Day



On February 25, 2016, NAMI Maryland held our annual Advocacy Day in Annapolis. Advocacy Day is our opportunity to gather and celebrate recovery, honor those who are living with mental illness, combat stigma, and promote awareness and advocate for others. Almost 100 NAMI Maryland members and supporters traveled to Annapolis to meet with their elected officials.

All of the 188 members of the General Assembly were hand-delivered packets of information outlining NAMI Maryland's advocacy priorities for the 2016 legislative session and beyond. Our message was simple, yet powerful - we can no longer ignore the critical need for a sustainable investment in timely and effective comprehensive mental health treatment, prevention and recovery throughout Maryland!



NAMI Anne Arundel County member, Pat Ranney, and NAMI Anne Arundel County President, Fred Delp, meet with Senator Ed Reilly during Advocacy Day.

Once the legislative visits were complete, NAMI Maryland members and supporters joined 500+ advocates at a rally to stand up for the more than 1 million Marylanders who live with a mental health or substance use issue. At noon, State Senator Guy Guzzone and State Delegate Hayes kicked the rally off to highlight the importance of their legislation, the Keep the Door Open Act (SB497/HB595).



Mental health advocates at rally on Lawyers Mall

Senator Guzzone spoke about how his legislation would “keep the doors to treatment open by supporting the medical professionals and direct care staff who have been doing more with less for far too long.” Delegate Hayes followed Senator Guzzone with a strong statement why he was committed to seeing this legislation pass the General Assembly. “We can’t let our community health providers drift in the wind during every budget cycle, behavioral health might not be a household name but it is a household need!” They were joined by other elected officials, individuals with mental illness and family members. Finally, Delegate Eric Luedtke addressed the crowd to bravely share his family’s personal

experience with mental illness and how it directly impacted their lives.

Once the rally was over, advocates were off to committee hearings. We were fortunate that many of our priority bills were being heard in their respective committees. One of which was SB551/HB682, that would require DHMH to develop a strategic plan to implement 24/7

statewide access to walk-in services and mobile crisis care teams. Only three of Maryland's 24 county jurisdictions have a walk-in crisis center. One of NAMI Maryland's members shared a powerful story with the Senate Finance Committee about why the availability of crisis services could have provided a better outcome by linking her to mental health services rather than the situation leading to involvement with the criminal justice system throughout her time in college.

At the end of the day, NAMI Maryland members and supporters underscored for legislators that Maryland can no longer ignore years of inadequate and unpredictable provider rate increases, or allow an individual in need of behavioral health care services to struggle, allow their condition to worsen or allow the individual to become a danger to themselves or others. Finally, Maryland must do more so that families no longer have to worry that their loved one may cycle into crisis, require expensive inpatient services, be discharged, and cycle down into yet another crisis.