



September 29, 2021

Dennis Schrader  
Secretary of Health  
Maryland Department of Health  
Herbert R. O'Connor State Office Building  
201 West Preston St.  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2399

Dear Secretary Schrader:

The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) respectfully requests the inclusion of \$2.5 million of funding in your FY23 budget proposal to launch the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans. As you know, the bill establishing this program unanimously passed both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly in the 2021 session.

There is great need for behavioral health services among veterans, service members and their families in Maryland. There are more than 400,000 veterans living in Maryland, of which an estimated 25,000 have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Across the state, approximately 10,000 veterans are dealing with post-traumatic stress or major depression. We know that veterans comprise 18% of all deaths by suicide in Maryland and this group is twice as likely as non-veterans to die by suicide. 12.4% of military suicides are by former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated and therefore, not eligible for VA services. Perhaps most troubling, 62.5% of veterans who take their own life are not under the care of the VA at the time of their death. Support for community-based services, as the law provides for, will go a long way to turning the tide on this epidemic.

The Montgomery County Chamber has long been committed to helping veterans succeed. The Chamber's foundation created the National Center for Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP), which is a free training program for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses and Maryland Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. Veteran-Owned company C-Level executives receive 27 hours of comprehensive instruction on how to accelerate their federal government contracting business skills. Despite the success of the VIP program, Maryland's veterans need additional support. That is why MCCC advocated for the creation of the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans and is asking for the program to be funded at \$2.5 million in FY23.

Thank you for considering this request and please do not hesitate to contact us if you need anything additional.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Godwin".

Georgette "Gigi" Godwin  
President & CEO  
Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce