

CREATION AND PURPOSE

Creation and Purpose of The Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC):

Based upon the practice begun by federal, state and local governments in the 1960's of inviting citizen participation in planning and evaluating public services, the broad rationale behind the Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC) is to help ensure that publicly-funded mental health services are:

1. Responsive to local needs;
2. Accountable to the citizenry;
3. Accessible to those in need.

In 1972, the Maryland State Legislature passed a law directing each county and Baltimore City to establish a Mental Health Advisory Committee to provide citizen oversight to all state-funded mental health agencies serving that particular jurisdiction (Annotated Code of Maryland, Section 10-308, 10-309, 10-310, 10-311(a), and 10-312(b), Article-Health-General). The most recent amendment to State law on Mental Health—County Advisory Committees was a result of House Bill No. 319, effective July 1, 1991.

Maryland State law governing the establishment of mental health advisory committees throughout Maryland defines the purpose of a mental health advisory committee:

"...to serve as advocate for a comprehensive mental health system for persons of all ages."

Subsequent to the initial State Legislation, the Montgomery County Council passed legislation creating the Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee (Sections 24-34 to 24-38, "Mental Health Advisory Committee" of Article IV, "Mental Health", of Chapter 24, "Health and Sanitation", of the Montgomery County Code 1972, as amended). The amendment of the law was made on August 4, 1992 (Bill No. 12-92—see Appendix 1) which specified major changes to the composition and duties of the MHAC. In 1996, the State Law recognized the Department of Health and Human Services (a merge of four major departments together) and provided for that Department to perform certain administrative responsibilities.

County law outlines the duties of the Mental Health Advisory Committee as follows:

1. Monitor, review and evaluate the allocation and adequacy of publicly-funded mental health services within the County through means such as conducting or participating in site visits;

2. Determine the needs of the County mental health system, including quality of services, gaps in the system, and interagency coordination;
3. Participate in the development of the local mental health plan and local mental health budget;
4. Prepare and disseminate an annual report to certain state and county officials;
5. Review and comment on the annual mental health plan and preliminary budget for the State mental health grant to the County;
6. Review and comment on the annual budget for mental health services of the Department of Health and Human Services.