



On Our Own of Maryland, Inc.

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Commission to Study Mental and Behavioral Health in Maryland Lt. Governor Boyd K. Rutherford, Chair

Verbal Testimony at March 9, 2021 Meeting

Hello, Lt. Governor, Senators, Delegates, Commission members, and everyone watching at home. As a person who has used mental health services, and a member of a family impacted by mental illness and addiction, from my heart I want to thank you for your commitment to improving our system of care, and for this opportunity to speak.

My name is Katie Rouse, and I'm the Executive Director of [On Our Own of Maryland](#). Since the 1980s, our peer-run network has launched 23 community-based [Wellness and Recovery Centers](#) throughout the state. At the last Commission meeting, you heard from Charisa, who works at [On Our Own of Frederick](#). Many of our 6,000+ members are not just living with a significant behavioral health issue, but thriving, and using what they have learned to help others stay well too.

In the Commission's Annual Reports and recommendations, the goal of recovery seems to be out of sight, and so out of mind. The goal of services should not be enforcing compliance, but helping people get back to a self-directed life in the community, with self-selected supports, as quickly as possible.

[Stigma](#) and feelings of powerlessness are already huge challenges for people who are on the edge of crisis, whether this is their first time or their fifth. If our policies focus on 'danger' but not deescalation, on 'resistance to treatment' but not trauma histories, and on 'deterioration,' but not diversion - we risk bending the system toward isolating, coercive, and painful experiences that drive people away. But, when we integrate peers (people with lived experience of behavioral health challenges) as partners and providers, and invest in a robust menu of recovery support services in the community, we reaffirm the dignity, agency, capacity for healing, and potential for recovery within every person. So in the Commission's third year of study, I ask you to explore and invest in the wisdom of people with lived experience to help shape our system so it continues to welcome people in, instead of pushing them away.

Thank you so much for your time and your listening.

Katie Rouse, Executive Director

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