

# THE HONORABLE KATIE FRY HESTER

## *2025 Legislator of the Year Award*

**Senator Katie Fry Hester** was elected to the Maryland Senate in 2018, where she has represented Howard County and Montgomery County. She currently sits on the Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment and serves as the Deputy Majority Whip.

In her time as a member of the Maryland General Assembly, Senator Hester has spearheaded numerous initiatives to ensure individuals living with mental health and substance use disorders can access services that most appropriately address their needs. She passed a bill that is helping younger Marylanders and their families access high-fidelity home- and community-based wraparound care and she was the lead sponsor of legislation that established the Maryland Behavioral Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence, which is helping to develop systems across the state designed to divert individuals with behavioral health needs away from the criminal justice system and into treatment.

Among her many successes, Senator Hester's biggest impact may be felt in her work to expand access to school behavioral health services. Since leading the effort in 2020 to ensure the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future public education reform bill adequately addressed the mental health and substance use needs of schoolchildren across the state, Senator Hester has worked tirelessly to ensure the appropriate implementation of that effort. Thanks in no small part to her passion and her work with the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports, more than \$110 million was allocated in late 2023 to expand behavioral health supports for public school students in every Maryland jurisdiction and another \$120 million was released in December 2024 to support students over the coming school year. This historic non-lapsing investment in the mental health and wellbeing of Maryland's youth is ensuring our students are prepared to learn and well positioned for academic and future success.

