



# BARRY GLASSMAN

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## HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information, contact:

Cindy Mumby

Director of Governmental & Community Relations

410-340-5376

[camumby@harfordcountymd.gov](mailto:camumby@harfordcountymd.gov)

### **Harford County Launches Summer Campaign Promoting Family Conversations about Mental Health & Addiction**

**BEL AIR, Md.,** (June 13, 2019) - The Glassman administration has launched a summer messaging campaign encouraging Harford County parents to talk to their children about substance use and mental health. This multi-media awareness campaign entitled “Harford Talks” was developed by the Harford County Department of Community Services’ Office of Drug Control Policy to help families have these important conversations.

“Parents tell us they struggle with these topics,” Amber Shrodes, director of Harford County Community Services said. “They worry about what is age appropriate, and how to approach subjects like overdose, recovery, and suicide. But children want to have this dialogue with the adults in their lives.”

In recent focus groups conducted by the Harford County Department of Community Services, high school students said that their number one wish was for parents and teachers to have a better understanding of mental health. Students also said they wanted adults to recognize the signs of addiction, depression, and suicide, and they wanted to feel more comfortable talking to adults about mental illness.

To help families prepare for these conversations, earlier this month the county launched [www.HarfordTalks.com](http://www.HarfordTalks.com), a website offering parents and children a vast array of resources about these sometimes-difficult issues. The website offers age-appropriate conversation starters and tips on how and when to raise these topics. In addition, the website offers tools to guide more specific discussions. They include how to talk to children when a friend or family member is in active addiction; what parents who are in recovery, or who have experienced a mental health crisis should say to their kids, and how to discuss addictions to video games and social media.

Beginning on June 14 through September, the Glassman administration will also be airing 45-second public service announcements in Harford County movie theaters showcasing the new campaign. The PSAs feature a series of humorous, “awkward conversations” and reassure parents that talking to their kids about substance use and mental health does not need to be uncomfortable. The PSAs will run at the Regal Theater in Bel Air and the Horizon Theater in Fallston, where they will be seen by an estimated 130,000 moviegoers this summer.

Billboards on Bel Air Road in Bel Air, and Route 40 in Havre de Grace, will also promote Harford Talks. The billboards’ artwork shows a teen declining to smoke marijuana, and directs parents to ask their children what they would do in this situation. Together the billboards are anticipated to reach more than 630,000 impressions.


Billboards are useful because car rides to and from school and other activities are often a perfect setting to tackle difficult subjects and practice refusal skills. In the car, distractions are limited and parents and children do not have to look directly at each other. The perceived separation helps children relax and open up.

This summer’s Harford Talks campaign is the latest marketing tool in the administration’s efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and strengthen families. Harford County government has won three National Association of Counties awards in the past four years for its innovative awareness initiatives to address substance use and mental health.

“With everything we do in local government, we know that nothing is more powerful than parents talking to their kids,” County Executive Barry Glassman said. “Harford Talks gives parents the resources they need to start these conversations and keep them going. Our goal is for every child who is feeling depressed, or contemplating suicide, or who may have questions about substance abuse and overdose, to feel comfortable talking to a parent or another trusted adult.”



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