

SUPPORT HB 332 - Emergency Facilities List - Comprehensive Crisis Response Centers, Crisis Stabilization Centers, and Crisis Treatment Centers.

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Jenny Zito, MAJR Executive Committee
DATE: February 12, 2020

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) supports HB 332 as an important step toward improving the ability of law enforcement, behavioral health personnel and crisis responders throughout the state to efficiently find the resources they need to provide opportunities for treatment to those in a variety of crisis situations.

Currently in Maryland, when police are called to public places or homes to handle crisis situations created by individuals with drug or alcohol problems, abusive behavior, or mental illness, these situations often lead to criminal charges instead of addressing the underlying causes with treatment. Even when first responders have been well trained in recognizing opportunities to divert people to treatment or other social services, the possible services available in each county may not be familiar to responders and may even be hard to discover when searching for these resources.

Some states, such as Virginia, have made concerted efforts to develop strong state-wide Crisis Response Programs. Crisis Intervention Teams that combine police and mental health professionals to help de-escalate crisis situations and divert people to social services such as drug/alcohol treatment, mental health evaluation and treatment, or to counseling or mediation. Training and providing support for these teams, providing extra personal, and funding the centers that provide these social service programs can have a substantial cost, but have proven to be cost effective in the long run because of improved functionality of individuals in their families and communities, and the reduced costs to the state related to crime and incarceration. One of the main services of such state-wide programs is to provide information on what programs are available.

Programs for assistance or treatment of people in crisis situations vary significantly depending on Maryland locality. Among the types of assistance programs that exist in some counties are: drug/alcohol abuse programs, mental health treatment programs, domestic violence/abuser programs, anger management programs, parenting classes, employment training, homeless services, veteran's services, victim-offender mediation, family mediation, restorative justice programs, and prostitution prevention programs. Having a state-level list of resources would be very helpful to making sure that a wide variety of programs are available in all locations and easy to locate and use by law enforcement, behavioral health agencies and crisis service providers. The tracking of centers that are currently available will also let the state understand what needs are not currently being met by existing centers.

This bill is an important step toward reducing the number of people being placed in jails and prisons who are primarily in need of treatment or services that could improve their ability to be functional and to contribute.

We hope you will vote to pass this strong step toward a better Maryland.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan association of over fifty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state, formed to support justice reinvestment. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.

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