

Support HB 1166 -- Diversion Programs

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Jim Rose, MAJR Executive Committee

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Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports HB 1166.

The role of policeman has expanded greatly in recent times: not only do we expect him/her to enforce the law, but as first responders to emergency events, we expect skilled crisis management and a full awareness of the impact on the citizen and the community. With these greater expectations, we have the responsibility to provide the police with tools to do the job.

The importance of community-based law enforcement has been underplayed in the past. This new legislation would be a big step in addressing infractions and minor problems found in some of our communities without further expanding the use of our detention and prison facilities. Using diversion to mental and health facilities instead of relying on our police to solve social problems will reduce Maryland's record of mass incarceration and will serve our communities well.

As the legislation proposes: "Law enforcement officers have a unique opportunity to facilitate connections to community-based behavioral health interventions that provide behavioral health services and can help save and restore lives, help reduce drug use, overdose incidence, and criminal offending and recidivism, and help prevent arrest and conviction records that destabilize health, families, and opportunities for community citizenship and self-sufficiency."

Baltimore City has an on-going program of Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) which sets an example for potential programs in the rest of the State. Washington County has taken that lesson to heart and instituted its own LEAD program. Other counties have benefited from greater efforts at diversion instead of arrest.

The State of Maryland needs to take a comprehensive approach to legal infractions that avoids unnecessary jail time. In addition to HB 1166, MAJR supports efforts to expand Crisis Intervention Teams throughout the State. Notably HB0607/SB0305 emphasize Crisis Response Centers, while HB0332/SB0441 address the need for the State to coordinate Crisis facilities and teams. Each of these bills offers important measures to deal with mental health problems without arrest and detention.

HB1166 is an important step in supporting existing programs, facilitating the introduction of new programs, evaluating the effectiveness of local efforts, and 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 further to society.

For these reasons, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a favorable report on HB1166.