

SUPPORT SB 454 - mental health training for law enforcement

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Will Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: February 13, 2020

Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (www.ma4jr.org) strongly supports SB 454 to require general police training for recognition of individuals with mental illness, as well as de-escalation and proper referrals, so that arrests may be avoided.

What's the Problem?

Studies of Maryland's pretrial system have estimated that at least 39% of local jail inmates suffer from mental health disorders (GOCCP 2016, p. 24 and p. 50; OPD 2017). Despite such a high incidence of mental illness, most Maryland law enforcement officers lack training in "crisis intervention" — that is, how to recognize, de-escalate and obtain appropriate mental health care for this large segment of their communities.

Police often 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.

Currently, many counties have specially designated "Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)" but the need is so great that such training should not be a specialty know only to a few. First responders need crisis intervention training in order to better assure safety, appropriate de-escalation, less lethal consequences and opportunities for treatment. The services available in each county may not be familiar to responders and may even be hard to discover for a busy law-enforcement officers searching for resources.

What's one Solution?

Some states, such as [Virginia](#), have made concerted state-wide efforts to train 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 these teams, providing extra personal, and funding social service programs has 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.

MAJR supports the formation of a strong Crisis Intervention Team program in Maryland. Along with mental health organizations such as [NAMI](#) and [MHAMD](#), MAJR supports improved training for law enforcement and first responders to recognize mental illness and be familiar with diversion options. We believe such efforts would reduce 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.

In particular, MAJR is supporting three 2020 bills:

- SB 305/HB 607 *Establishing the Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence in the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention;*

- SB 454/HB 1470 *Mandatory Mental Health Training – First Responders and Law Enforcement Officers*; and
- HB 332/SB 441 *Emergency Facilities List – Comprehensive Crisis Response Centers, Crisis Stabilization Centers, and Crisis Treatment Centers*.

Do Crisis Intervention Teams work?

Some Maryland counties and Baltimore City have already started Crisis Intervention Team Training (CIT). The city was under a consent decree to analyze what was better needed in the city to respond to crisis situations relating to mental health and produced a [Gap Analysis](#). The Baltimore Police Department CIT curriculum has been based on national best practice models, such as the [Memphis model](#). The training consists of 40 hours focused on mental health, including de-escalation techniques and hearing from individuals with lived experience, with the goal of diverting individuals with behavioral health disabilities from the criminal justice system.

Other programs for assistance or treatment of people in crisis situations vary significantly depending on county. Among the types of assistance programs that exist in some Maryland 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.

Learn More!

Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy “Study on Alternatives to Incarceration” http://msccsp.org/Files/Reports/Alternatives_to_incarceration_Jan2018.pdf

NAMI’s National Public Policy Document: [https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Public-Policy/Public-Policy-Platform-December-2016-\(1\).pdf](https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Public-Policy/Public-Policy-Platform-December-2016-(1).pdf)

Baltimore Public Behavioral Health System Gap Analysis, Final Report, December 2019 <https://www.baltimorepolice.org/baltimore-public-health-system-gap-analysis>

Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention, [Substance Use and Mental Health Disorders Gaps and Needs Analysis](#), December 31, 2016.

NAMI Maryland, Johns Hopkins School of Education, and Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, [Summit Report Course Correction: Collaboration of Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Advancing New and Proven Models for State and Local Government](#), 2017

National Conference of State Legislatures, “[The Legislative Primer Series for Front End Justice: Mental Health](#),” August 2018.

Treatment Advocacy Center and National Sheriffs Association, [More Mentally Ill Persons are in Jails and Prisons than Hospitals: A Survey of the States](#) (May 2010).

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) *Crisis Intervention Training*: <https://www.mhamd.org/crisis-intervention-training/> , 2019

The University of Memphis, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, *Crisis Intervention Team Core Elements*, <http://www.citinternational.org/resources/Pictures/CoreElements.pdf>

Nov 2019 Symposium in Baltimore: *The Case for Crisis Response*, <https://disabilityrightsmd.org/decriminalizing-disability-the-case-for-crisis-response-in-baltimore-city/>

PLEASE NOTE: Phil Caroom offers this testimony for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform and not for the Md. Judiciary.