

February 11, 2020

Senate Bill 305 - Public Safety - Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence - SUPPORT

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland strongly supports Senate Bill 305, legislation that would create a Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence to provide technical for local jurisdictions bring together law enforcement, behavioral health, and the resources necessary to help divert individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system and into the treatment they need.

The value of crisis intervention teams is in making encounters between law enforcement and individuals with mental illnesses safer, more dignified and more informed. Research has shown that accomplishing this effectively involves many steps, the work of many people, and can take years.

Beginning with the creation of the Memphis Model of CIT in the mid-1980s, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has been central to the establishment of CIT programs nationwide – providing advocacy for people with mental illnesses and support to families. In addition to law enforcement, stakeholders include mental health services providers, hospitals, EMS and peers.

Law enforcement agencies, in partnership with stakeholders, must determine which program best suits their needs, and plan their responses and the needed training collaboratively. Collaboration among a diverse set of stakeholders is the first element and is pivotal to developing effective Crisis Intervention Team programs.

NAMI Maryland has been proud to partner with organizations like the Mental Health Association of Maryland, the Behavioral Health Administration, and others to grow CIT across the state. Over the years, we've made tremendous improvement, but we know there's more we can do. Creating a small, focused place within the state will help elevate our work beyond a piecemeal county-by-county strategy into a full-scale, statewide resource to serve our local communities.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on SB 305.

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