

## **Support for SB 454 with Amendments**

### **Public Safety – Mandatory Mental Health Training – First Responders**

#### **and Law Enforcement Officers**

**Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**February 13, 2020**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a voluntary, non-profit citizens' organization concerned with all aspects of behavioral health. MHAMD's Coalition on Mental Health and Aging is comprised of representatives from aging, mental health, consumer, family and professional associations and government agencies working together to improve the quality and accessibility of behavioral health assessment, treatment, recovery and illness prevention services for older Marylanders.

We applaud SB 454 which requires mandatory mental health training regarding mental health to first responders and law enforcement officers. The rates of mental health disorders is disproportionately high among older adults, which is a quickly growing demographic in Maryland. In fact, individuals over the age of 80 are the fastest growing segment of Maryland's population. Among this age cohort, it is estimated that one in three individuals is afflicted with some form of dementia. Also problematic among older adults is delirium which commonly results from medications, infections or other organic physiological causes. Recent analysis of Emergency Department visits reveal high rates of delirium among older patients.

We believe Maryland' older adults, first responders and law enforcement officers will all benefit from the addition of dementia and delirium education with the mental health curriculum. Many problematic symptoms of dementia overlap with behavioral health disorders and the same is true for delirium. For example, individuals with dementia or delirium may present with agitation, psychosis, inability to sustain focus, inability to communicate, combative and oppositional behaviors and other symptoms of anxiety and depression. Yet, because of disease differences, responses appropriate for a mental health problem might actually exacerbate the distress and problematic behaviors of an individual with dementia or delirium.

Without understanding dementia and delirium, officers and first responders might unintentionally worsen the situation in cases involving older adults.

The Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging supports SB 454 with an amendment to add language at the end of SB 454 to read:

SECTION 1

(B)

(7) UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIORAL AND PSYCHIATRIC SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA AND DELIRIUM

(8) ENGAGE APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEMENTIA AND DELIRIUM; AND

(9) ENABLE EARLY INTERVENTION THROUGH RECOGNITION OF SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA AND DELIRIUM

Given the rapid rise of individuals experiencing dementia and delirium, first responders and law officers should know as much about those conditions as they do about mental health conditions. This education will benefit our communities and we urge your favorable response to SB 454 with amendments.