



February 18, 2020

House Judiciary Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 607- Public Safety- Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving nearly 75,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore is in support of HB 607- Public Safety- Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence. This bill establishes a Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence (CITCE) in the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP). The CITCE will provide technical support to local governments, law enforcement, public safety agencies, behavioral health agencies, and crisis service providers and develop, and implement a “crisis intervention model program.” The bill also establishes a Collaborative Planning and Implementation Committee for the CITCE.

Too often law enforcement agencies are the first responders to people experiencing a mental health crisis. Each year, two million jail bookings involve a person with mental illness. Forty percent of individuals with a severe mental illness will have spent time in either jail, prison or community corrections ¹

In order to improve law enforcements response to behavioral health crises Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) currently collaborates with the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) to utilize the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), which is a nationally recognized model for community policing that has proven to keep those experiencing mental illness out of jails and improve public safety. BHSB and BPD provide new city officers with 40 hours of CIT training and are implementing ongoing refresher trainings for supervisors and seasoned patrol officers, and specific training for 911 and dispatch operators. In addition, in 2017 BHSB in collaboration with various stakeholders implemented a pilot program that pairs a CIT trained officer with a clinician in Baltimore City’s Central District.

CIT helps to improve officers’ ability to address mental health crises and ensure safety of officers, individuals in crisis, and bystanders. The collaboration between officers and behavioral health providers allows for the identification of resources, provides assistance to those experiencing the crisis and their families, and ensures officers get the training and support needed to respond.

Maryland must continue to prioritize implementation of CIT across the state to ensure persons with mental health disorders are not continuing to fill our jails and prisons. As such, **BHSB urges the House Judiciary Committee to support HB 607.**

¹ Subramanian R., Delaney R. Roberts S., Fishman N., McGarry P. (2015). “Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America” Vera Institute of Justice 4. Accessed April 9, 2015 at: <http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/incarcerations-front-door-report.pdf>