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**House Bill 607 Public Safety – Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence**

Judiciary Committee

February 18, 2020

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony in support of House Bill 607.

HB 607 establishes a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Center of Excellence to assist local jurisdictions in developing, evaluating and improving CIT programs across Maryland. CIT is a law enforcement-led, team-based intervention to divert individuals experiencing behavioral health crises away from the criminal justice system and into treatment. It results in less lethal interactions, better outcomes and increased safety for all involved.

CIT is not new to Maryland. Since 2013, a subcommittee of the Maryland Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Partnership (BHCJP) has been working with the Behavioral Health Administration and a range of other stakeholders to standardize the model and expand it in jurisdictions across the state. The group has created a document outlining the core standards and elements that should be present in any effective and sustainable program; developed a roadmap of key implementation milestones to help local jurisdictions put the different pieces into place; worked to coordinate efforts among local partners; organized a series of regional relationship-building forums and statewide conferences for law enforcement and behavioral health professionals; surveyed all chiefs and sheriffs throughout the state on CIT awareness, interest and implementation barriers; and held a first-of-its-kind CIT train-the-trainer for a core group of local law enforcement and behavioral health partners, building an expertise and capacity that is allowing for more regional and local CIT training.

Tremendous progress has been made. While CIT coverage was sparse in 2013, there is now at least some CIT presence in most areas of the state. But the work is far from complete, and the Center of Excellence established under HB 607 would provide that extra level of support necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of around-the-clock CIT coverage in every law enforcement agency and jurisdiction throughout Maryland.

For this reason, MHAMD and the BHCJP CIT Subcommittee support HB 607 and urge a favorable report.

*For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865*