



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: February 18th, 2020

Re: HB 607 - Public Safety - Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland State House Judiciary Committee

Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to represent myself, having spent my career as a police officer, and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by addressing the root causes of crime, promoting alternatives to arrest and incarceration, and working toward healing police-community relations.

After decades with the Baltimore Police Department, I began working as a police practices expert for the US Department of Justice. In both roles, I saw that community trust was hard to earn and easy to lose. As Commanding Officer of the Eastern District, I reduced crime significantly by establishing serious community policing programs. But working with DOJ, I saw cities lose decades' worth of trust due to officer-involved shootings.

One of the simplest and most important ways to prevent unnecessary officer-involved shootings is to equip police with Crisis Intervention Training (CIT). Police are constantly called on to deal with people in mental health crisis. De-escalation techniques can easily be taught to defuse these crises without shootings that provoke community outrage. Yet a shockingly high number of agencies still do not train officers to de-escalate confrontations with people in crisis.

HB 607 would create a CIT coordinating body to help improve police response to individuals with mental illness and secure grant funding for CIT training and connection to services. Other states including Ohio and New Jersey have created similar CIT centers.

LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org

Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

The CIT center would not only help police agencies train officers to de-escalate crises, they would also work with mental health care agencies to coordinate services. They can design wraparound plans to prevent the same people from cycling from one crisis to the next.

This bill allows police to use our resources effectively to reduce confrontation, save lives, and build trust. It does not place new requirements on us.

Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate your past support on this issue, and I believe this is the year we will establish the CIT Center of Excellence here in Maryland.

Respectfully,

Deputy Secretary Wendell M. France, Sr. (Ret.)
Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services
Retired Major, Baltimore Police Department
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership