

Support HB 607 - Crisis Intervention center

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: February 18, 2020

Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports HB 607.

Studies of Maryland's pretrial system have estimated that at least 39% of local jail inmates suffer from mental health disorders (GOCCP 2016, p. 24 and p. 50; OPD 2017). Despite such a high incidence of mental illness, most Maryland law enforcement officers lack training in "crisis intervention" — that is, how to recognize, de-escalate and obtain appropriate mental health care for this large segment of their communities.

While the fiscal impact note for HB 607 may seem substantial, the cost of not using best practices is greater:

Maryland jail wardens and national studies agree that more mentally ill persons are in jails and prisons than hospitals (See, for example, TAC and NSA, 2010). But many Maryland wardens also complain of insufficient resources for both community-based, in-jail, and post-release treatment (GOCCP 2016, p. 9). This failure to provide treatment resources assures an even greater ongoing, long-term burden on Marylanders—in detention costs, law enforcement time, and public safety. The reason is clear:

More than 95% of county jail inmates will eventually return to the community and, if mental health and substance abuse issues remain untreated, they are very likely to cycle back into the system through the county jail, again and again (JRCC, pl.12). Indeed, the risk of reoffending is greater as studies suggest that incarceration increases the likelihood of new offenses.

For all these reasons, Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a favorable report on HB 607.

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PLEASE NOTE: Phil Caroom offers this testimony for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform and not for the Md. Judiciary.