



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HOUSE BILL 607 - PUBLIC SAFETY - CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM CENTER OF  
EXCELLENCE

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN  
February 18, 2020

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for hearing this bill and for your support of our efforts on the 2019 legislation. This legislation will establish a Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence in the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention and is similar to the bill passed out of the House last year.

The goal of this legislation is to build upon and support the implementation of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) best practices in law enforcement agencies across the state.

The goal of a centralized Center of Excellence is to maximize resources and supports beyond traditional trainings for local law enforcement to improve their response to behavioral health crisis. New Jersey and Ohio have greatly increased the success of their local CIT programs by instituting similar state-wide coordination centers. We have also included two case studies from Bexar County, Texas and Miami-Dade County, Florida. There are many efforts across the US to implement CIT as an effective tool for diverting individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system. The benefits are incredible – not only for individuals with mental illness, but in reducing injury and lost time for law enforcement, overall the potential cost savings are pretty incredible. And, a statewide center means our local law enforcement bodies will be supported by one Center of Excellence rather than having to make these investments jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction.

Nearly a quarter of police shootings and approximately 10% of police encounters involve residents experiencing a serious mental health crisis.<sup>1</sup> These contacts, more often than not, result in the arrest of the resident. This is evidenced by the fact that 56% of state prisoners struggle with serious mental illness.<sup>2</sup> Entry into the criminal justice system is likely to result in higher levels of

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio CIT Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence, *The Strategic Plan*.

<sup>2</sup> NAMI, *Department of Justice Study: Mental Illness of Prison Inmates Worse Than Past Estimates*, (Sept. 6, 2006) <https://www.nami.org/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2006/Department-of-Justice-Study-Mental-Illness-of-Pris>.

recidivism.<sup>3</sup> The aim of a CIT program is to partner law enforcement with mental health professionals and other advocates, in order that those who are experiencing a serious mental health crisis receive treatment rather than enter the criminal justice system. Research indicates that police who participate in a fully implemented CIT program (based on the best practices the Center will promote) will arrest fewer people.<sup>4</sup>

In order to reap the benefits of a fully functioning CIT program, it is essential to adopt nationally accepted *core elements*. The Center will encourage the incorporation of these elements. These elements, for example, include strong and continued partnerships between law enforcement, advocacy, and mental health professionals. Operational elements include facilitation between officers, dispatchers, and coordinators. Further implementation is encouraged through an up-to-date curriculum (training) and maintaining open communications with mental health receiving facilities. From a follow up perspective, the Center facilitates a continued and thorough review of statewide CIT policies and procedures, a formal evaluation process, and dissemination via in-service training based on the most successful of those policies and practices.

This bill will create the Maryland Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence to help local jurisdictions in creating, evaluating, and improving CIT's by facilitating collaboration between law enforcement, mental health professionals, and local governments. Besides helping fully implement the ideals of CIT programs, the Center will provide the valuable practical knowledge to sustain it. In the short term, it will better direct limited resources by ensuring police departments and mental health professionals properly respond to those in crisis. Over the long term, law enforcement will be freed up to address truly criminal matters while, at the same time, help those with mental health and substance abuse issues access life-improving treatment.

This legislation is a priority for the entire Behavioral Health Coalition. You have in your packets support from the Chiefs and Sheriffs Association – we are proud they support the creation of the Center and are willing to lead the charge on law enforcement support when it comes to diverting individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system.

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<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Recidivism*, <https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 394.