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Ways and Means Committee

Chair
Early Childhood Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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HB 1166 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement Diversion Programs

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary and members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 1166. This bill would formally authorize Law Enforcement Diversion programs in Maryland and require the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention to collect data and release an annual report on these programs. This would benefit jurisdictions that already have a program and for jurisdictions that may want to utilize one in the future. It would not require jurisdictions to adopt the program.

In a Law Enforcement Diversion program, police officers exercise discretionary authority at the point of contact to divert individuals to a community-based, harm-reduction intervention for law violations driven by unmet behavioral health needs. In lieu of the normal criminal justice system cycle -- booking, detention, prosecution, conviction, incarceration -- individuals are instead referred into a case-management program where the individual receives a wide range of support services, often including transitional and permanent housing and/or drug treatment. Prosecutors and police officers work closely with case managers to ensure that all contacts with Diversion Program participants going forward, including new criminal prosecutions for other offenses, are coordinated with the service plan for the participant to maximize the opportunity to achieve behavioral change.

This bill is an important step for bolstering existing programs, understanding the effectiveness of those programs, encouraging new programs in other jurisdictions, and reducing the number of people in the criminal justice system. I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 1166.

Thank you,

Eric Ebersole