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Date: March 25, 2025

Re: HB 1066 - Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access -
Membership and Workgroups

Position: SUPPORT

To: Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Mike Hilliard, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of myself, as a retired Major with the Baltimore City Police Department, and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for Maryland HB 1066, which would establish a workgroup to examine the accessibility and outcomes of treatment received through the criminal justice system, to be housed under the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access. I believe this legislation is crucial to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of court-referred substance-use treatment, so that we can better align these resources toward public health and safety, equity, and fiscal responsibility.

The Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP) is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, promoting alternatives to arrest and incarceration, addressing the root causes of crime, and working toward healing police-community relations.

Throughout my 27-year policing career with the Baltimore Police Department, I saw the devastating effects substance-use disorders have on individuals and their communities. Heroin use was a crisis in Baltimore when I began as a patrol officer. Now, amid the explosion of fentanyl into the drug supply, overdoses are higher than ever before. Addiction and the overdose epidemic present serious threats to both

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public health and safety. The criminal justice system has a role to play in confronting these issues, but we must ensure that we are offering solutions that genuinely set people up for success, not failure.

The new workgroup outlined in HB 1066 would investigate the effectiveness and accessibility of court-referred substance-use treatment and recovery support, including programs that offer housing and employment. This workgroup would also explore the extent to which individuals within the criminal justice system are directed to these services and how their treatment outcomes compare to voluntary treatment. Additionally, this group would examine the financial cost of criminal justice interventions for substance use.

By creating a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of how our current system operates, this workgroup would be able to provide informed recommendations to make mandated substance-use treatment programs more effective at reducing recidivism, enhancing health outcomes, promoting racial equity, and reducing costs to the state and local government.

Existing data on court-referred treatment programs has shown that [outcomes vary greatly by race](#), highlighting one area of particular concern. Black and Hispanic individuals who are referred to treatment by the courts are less likely to complete programs and more likely to face reincarceration compared to their white counterparts. These disparities raise questions about the equity and effectiveness of our current approaches, contributing to further distrust of the justice system among communities of color, who may view this as another example of its [uneven treatment based on race](#).

The transparency and accountability measures within HB 1066 could help rebuild community trust in the justice system by ensuring that we are not investing taxpayer dollars in ineffective or racially biased programs. As law enforcement, we know that we are only as strong as our relationships with the public. System wide, the research underscores that having trust from the people we serve [directly impacts public safety](#). We can only prevent, detect, and solve crime if witnesses and victims are willing to come forward to report criminal activity and work with us to address it. If people see lawmakers taking steps to improve current practices to be more effective and equitable, they will be more likely to assist us in our efforts to uphold safety and justice.

In sum, HB 1066 provides us with a critical opportunity to review and improve Maryland's court-referred treatment programs, which will help us ensure that we are effectively and efficiently using our finite resources to improve public health and safety. As retired law enforcement, I urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Major Mike Hilliard (Ret.)
Baltimore Police Department
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership

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