

MALCOLM AUGUSTINE
Legislative District 47
Prince George's County

Finance Committee
Energy and Public Utilities Subcommittee

Senate Chair, Joint Committee on the
Management of Public Funds



Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Suite 3 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3745 · 301-858-3745
800-492-7122 Ext. 3745
Fax 410-841-3387 · 301-858-3387
Malcolm.Augustine@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SENATE BILL 305 - PUBLIC SAFETY - CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR MALCOLM AUGUSTINE

Before Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 11, 2020

SB 305 will establish a Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence in the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention. 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.

Nearly a quarter of police shootings and approximately 10% of police encounters involve residents experiencing a serious mental health crisis.¹ 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.² Entry into the criminal justice system is likely to result in

¹ Ohio CIT Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence, *The Strategic Plan*.

² 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>.

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higher levels of recidivism.³ 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.⁴

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

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

⁴ *Id.* at 394.

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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.