

**Senate Bill 857- Health - Maryland Community Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence -  
Establishment  
Finance Committee  
March 11, 2021  
Position: Favorable**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates, and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness, and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 857 as amended by the sponsor.

SB 857 establishes the Maryland Community Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence. This bill charges the Center with furthering a sequential intercept model (SIM) framework to divert individuals with serious mental health and substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system. We thank the sponsor for introducing this bill, and for adopting amendments to ensure the Center is performing its duties with an eye toward equity.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, [two million adult arrests](#), or roughly 16.9 percent, in the United States each year involve people with serious mental illnesses. It's estimated that roughly [70 percent of youth](#) in the juvenile justice system have mental health conditions.<sup>1</sup> Social, economic, and environmental conditions – where individuals live, work and play- significantly impact an individual's health and healthcare, including access to mental and substance use disorder treatment services. Public health professionals refer to these conditions as the social determinants of health.

The problem is even worse for certain populations of society. Racial and ethnic minorities have less access to behavioral health services than white people. They are less likely to receive needed care. They are more likely to receive poor-quality care when they are treated. Troublingly, although this results in disparate minority criminalization, incarcerated people of color are less likely to be identified as having a behavioral health disorder and are less likely to receive treatment.

The SIM is a systems-planning framework to improve outcomes for people with mental health and substance use needs who become involved with the criminal justice system. However, the model has never been implemented with an eye toward ensuring the resulting strategies and policies are equitable across populations, particularly those minority populations who will be most impacted.

**For these reasons, we support Senate Bill 857 with the sponsor amendments.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/care-coordination/mental-illness-a-condition-not-a-crime.html>