

Rodney Coster
Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee
February 9, 2021

Senate Bill 286 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - Modification
Expands funding for behavioral health crisis responses
POSITION: SUPPORT

Good Afternoon, members of the Committee, my name is Rodney Coster, and I am a resident of Baltimore County, currently living in Middle River. I am here today to ask you to support SB 286, to create additional mobile crisis services in the state. For most of my adult life, I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Although I typically do very well on my medication, and have worked for most of my life, my family has occasionally decided that I needed mental health care on an emergency basis. My experience having the police respond to a mental health issue, usually called in by my mom, has not been good. I would absolutely support the use of trained mental health clinicians over having the police respond. We need this all over Maryland.

Just over three years ago, my mother was worried about me because I had stopped taking my medication and she thought I was in crisis. She and I drove over to the Harford County Detention Center, which is near her house, because she wanted to ask for help getting me to a hospital for an evaluation. I did not think I needed it, but she had done this before in Baltimore County and gotten help. Without going into too much detail, it did not go well at all. Although my mom told them right off the bat that I am bipolar and she needed help, the police did not listen. I am a nonviolent person, and I did not have a weapon, but I was hurt very badly by the deputies and held in the Detention Center for two months, most of it in solitary confinement. I was having a very hard time anyway, and keeping me in solitary confinement just made everything worse. The results for me were very bad. I lost my job, because I was not able to travel out of state anymore, and I lost a job I was working on getting with the County. I spent time in the state hospital, and I was supposed to be going away on a cruise, and I missed that.

I really think that if my mom could have called mobile crisis response and had trained counselors respond to me, things would have been very different. People need to know these services are available and that they can call and get help. I do not believe people's liberty should be taken away from them without their permission, and particularly when they are not committing any crime.

I ask you give SB 286 a favorable report.