

**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**  
**OPIOID OPERATIONAL COMMAND CENTER**



**STEVEN R. SCHUH**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Delores G. Kelley  
Chair, Finance Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Brian J. Feldman  
Vice Chair, Finance Committee  
James Senate Office Building  
Room 104  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee:

I am Steve Schuh, Executive Director of the Opioid Operational Command Center, and I am pleased to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 857: Behavioral Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence.

For those who are unfamiliar, the Opioid Operational Command Center was established by Governor Hogan in 2017 to respond to the acceleration in overdose-related fatalities. Our office is charged with coordinating the state's response to the opioid crisis through partnering with all relevant state departments and with the local Opioid Intervention Teams that are located in Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City. Through this coordination, we ensure that the state is implementing strategies that align with Governor Hogan's policy priorities for responding to the opioid crisis: *Prevention & Education, Enforcement & Public Safety* and *Treatment & Recovery*.

The Opioid Operational Command Center recognizes fully the link between substance use disorder and involvement in the criminal justice system. The National Institute on Drug Abuse indicates that an estimated 65% of the United States prison population has an active substance use disorder. Another 20% of people in prison – who do not technically meet the criteria for having an active substance use disorder – were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their arrest. These are staggering statistics, and they underscore the need to identify innovative approaches for meeting the needs of this population. Accordingly, I am strongly supporting the creation of the Center of Excellence, which we believe will help achieve this goal.

Senator Hester and I both have the honor of serving on the Commission to Study Mental and Behavioral Health, which is chaired by Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford. Senator Hester and Dr. Linda Boneskie co-chair the Public Safety and Judicial Subcommittee, and I chair the Crisis Services subcommittee. Understanding that there is an overrepresentation of individuals with substance use disorder involved in the criminal justice system, we believe that there needs to be better coordination

and partnership between the behavioral health and public safety worlds. Therefore, I was excited to learn about Senator Hester's work with the Public Safety and Judicial Subcommittee to bring to bear a Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) Summit last fall. The Sequential Intercept Model is a framework for identifying points at which someone with a mental health or substance use disorder encounters the criminal justice system. After some initial planning discussions with the Senator, she and I quickly decided to join forces and began pursuing this Summit as a joint venture between each of our respective subcommittees.

The purpose of hosting the SIM Summit was to convene subject-matter experts from around the state to complete a landscape analysis of resources, gaps and opportunities related to the various intercepts outlined in the SIM Framework. The product was a report that identified recommendations on how the state can better meet the needs of people with behavioral health disorders and help prevent interactions with the criminal justice system, avoid penetration through the correctional system, and provide support to justice-involved individuals as they reenter the community.

Pursuing the recommendations outlined in the SIM Summit Report will take a coordinated effort from multiple stakeholders with subject-matter expertise in behavioral health and public safety. We are glad that SB857 will establish a Center of Excellence to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the SIM Summit Report and will facilitate a more-targeted focus on bridging the behavioral health and public safety worlds.

Ensuring that people with behavioral health care needs who are involved in the criminal-justice system, or who are at risk of involvement, are connected to resources is of critical importance to our office. We know that the criminal-justice system is not the right place for individuals with behavioral health needs, which is why we as a state need to do more to ensure that actions are taken to provide resources and support for individuals at whatever point they encounter the criminal justice system. The establishment of the Center of Excellence will help achieve this, which is why we urge a favorable report on SB857.

Sincerely,



Steve Schuh  
Executive Director  
Opioid Operational Command Center