



Senate Finance Committee

February 9, 2021

Senate Bill 286 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications

Support

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, third quarter data from the Maryland Department of Health shows a 12% increase in the number of deaths in 2020, over the same period the year before. There are also disturbing trends in the impact of the crisis on communities of color.

Senate Bill 286 increases resources to help people in crisis. Through the existing Behavioral Health Crisis Services grant program, the Behavioral Health Administration has been able to support a number of local programs, including increasing staffing for walk-in crisis centers, expanding existing mobile crisis services to be 24-hours instead of overnight, and expanding crisis services to include substance use disorder peer support, system navigation, and urgent psychiatric appointments.

These mobile crisis services are designed to meet people where they are, and the bill proposes to increase services that specifically include community feedback and reduce interactions with law enforcement. NCADD-Maryland believes that these are smart strategies and vital services to address the growing numbers of overdose deaths and suicides. These approaches also reduce the instances where law enforcement is called to intervene in behavioral health crises. This will save lives as well.

We urge a favorable report on SB 286.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.