



## **Testimony before the House Health and Government Operations Committee**

### **Support**

#### **HB 537**

### **Mental Health Law – Petitions for Emergency Evaluation - Procedures**

**February 16, 2021**

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for House Bill 537- Mental Health Law – Petitions for Emergency Evaluation – Procedures

This bill would repeal the requirement that a peace officer be involved in the emergency petition process and leaves that choice up to the mental health professional who has done the evaluation. It is sometimes very helpful to have the aid of a peace officer in these difficult situations. However, there have been a number of unfortunate cases where the involvement of law enforcement has made the situation worse rather than better. NASW supports the bill's intent to reduce/remove police involvement in accessing mental health treatment.

While considering this legislation we reached out to our clinicians who have been involved in the EP process and here are some of their comments:

“As someone who does 4-6 EP per year, I would support this bill. Very often my families of color do not want the police called to their homes or to assist with their loved ones under any circumstance. Even to the point that they will underreport or hide information that they know may result in EP (even when they desperately want help!)”

“This would be great for ACT teams and mobile crisis teams as well. While some mobile crisis teams work with police (officer goes out to every one of the mobile crisis teams calls), some do not. The clinicians go out on their own to assess intervene and call police in if needed (for EP or if situation is acutely dangerous). ACT teams and other forms of mobile intensive treatment, are used to seeing their clients in the community and often transport to many other places.”

“Having worked on a mobile crisis team for almost 20 years and, during this time, completed hundreds of EP's, I very much appreciate the move to decriminalize mental health crises and to bring more awareness to how traumatizing the EP process can be.”

We are aware of amendments to the bill which appear to make it stronger and support those as well.

**We encourage the committee to please vote in favor of HB 537.**

Thank you,

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