

Name: Gretchen Tome

Date of Hearing: Tuesday February 16th, 2021 at 1:30pm

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Sponsored by: Delegate Sheila Ruth

Bill Number: HB0537

Full Title of the Bill: Mental Health Law – Petitions for Emergency Evaluation – Procedures

Position: In Support of Passing HB0537/SB0398

As a social worker and advocate for moving toward a world without policing, I support this bill and hope that you will, as well.

This bill does two things. First, it makes it optional to involve law enforcement when filing an emergency petition. Under current state law, you must involve law enforcement when filing an EP. The second change is that the person filing the petition can escort the person being EP'd to the emergency room themselves. Under current state law, law enforcement has to bring the person to the ER.

As a social worker, I have had to file emergency petitions at times when working with people who were struggling with suicidal thoughts and plans, and unable to keep themselves safe. I am always torn about using the EP process because I have never had a good experience once police become involved. At the very least, the responding officers have been condescending or rude to the person I'm working with, or they have argued with me that they cannot help. Steps are being taken to move toward removing police from the mental health/substance use crisis response; Behavioral Health System Baltimore along with many partners currently has grant funding to create a more robust 24/7 crisis response system that involves social workers and peer advocates rather than police. This bill will be helpful in moving that system forward.

Thank you for your time. In closing, I urge a favorable report and ask you to support this bill.