



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood Maryland Team

Committee: Health and Government Operations Committee

Testimony on: HB0108 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - Modifications

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 2, 2021

Bill Contact: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep its members healthy and safe in a clean environment and which promote equity across all of our diverse communities. Equity requires an appropriate response by law enforcement authorities to individuals with mental health challenges. DTMG strongly supports HB0108 because it builds on the existing Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program to ensure that local governments are investing in a comprehensive program equipped to address Marylanders in crisis.

Numerous recent events have illuminated the need for fundamental changes in how police departments respond to someone having a mental health emergency. Since 2015, nearly a quarter of all people killed by police officers in America have had a known mental illness. Mobile Crisis Units, or Mobile Crisis Teams, are designed to respond rapidly to individuals experiencing crisis and include emergency mental health evaluations performed by a clinician who can help stabilize or determine the right placement for an individual to be stabilized. Connections to community-based services and additional follow up and support should necessarily follow an initial law enforcement response.

The goal of HB0108 is to ensure more careful integration of the mental health care system with law enforcement. Many jurisdictions in Maryland have made substantial progress in training their officers to deescalate encounters with people having mental health crises, and either respond appropriately or call for an appropriate response to an individual in crisis. Increased cultural competence-- the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people of varying languages and cultures-- is also needed in many law enforcement calls to deal with individuals having a mental health crises. However, increased training will still not address the overall lack of systemic crisis response.

HB0108 will address these problems and enhance the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program by increasing its funding, extending the Program through FY 2025, strengthening the definition of Mobile Crisis Teams, strengthening the requirements for grants provided through the Program, and ensuring that outcome data from funded programs is collected, analyzed, and used

to formulate policy recommendations to decrease criminal detention and improve crisis diversion programs and linkages to effective community health services.

HB0108 will encourage local governments to invest in Mobile Crisis Teams that minimize the role of law enforcement in crisis interactions, are culturally competent, ably work with local communities, and ensure there is follow-up care. This will improve health and safety for vulnerable Maryland residents in their time of greatest need.

For all of these reasons, DTMG strongly supports HB0108 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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