



HOUSE BILL 0271

RICH GIBSON, HOWARD COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

POSITION: FAVORABLE HB 0271

February 8, 2021

My name is Rich Gibson and I'm the State's Attorney for Howard County. Part of my obligations as State's Attorney is to advocate for laws that enhance the safety and well-being of our community; that is the reason I am writing today to support House Bill 0271.

House Bill 0271, if enacted, would provide a legal basis to support the creation of law enforcement-based diversionary programs. As a veteran prosecutor, it is abundantly clear to me that not every problem that is criminal in nature is best suited to be handled in the criminal justice system. There are instances where a criminal actor or criminal action merits the full weight of everything the justice system can bring to bear. However, there are other instances where there is a criminal wrongdoing but exposing that individual to any criminal consequence would lead to draconian results. In those circumstances, having options like law enforcement diversionary programs, allow us to connect people in need with services and help that addresses the root cause of the criminal behavior without the collateral consequences of the justice system. At this moment, I am working in conjunction with Howard County Police, Howard County Sheriff's Office, the Howard County Department of Mental Health, representatives from the Howard County Public Defender's Office, the Howard County Detention Center, and the Howard County Executive's Office to bring the LEAD Program to our jurisdiction. This is a collaborative effort that has broad support

from the leaders in our community because we, as a collective body, see the value in crafting more options when addressing criminal matters. I strongly support House Bill 0271 and ask that the legislature give House Bill 0271 a favorable report.