



**House Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2021**

**House Bill 271
Public Safety - Law Enforcement Diversion Programs
Support**

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports House Bill 271. Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion programs (LEAD) seek to divert people engaged in illegal drug or prostitution activity before they are arrested and booked. This bill will give permission for local authorities to create a LEAD program in their community. The bill specifies who needs to be involved in the development of the program and outlines the activities that may be involved.

There is a great amount of distrust and fear of police among people who use drugs. Our society has shamefully treated substance use disorders as a criminal justice problem instead of a public health challenge. LEAD programs give law enforcement officers the permission to do something different than arrest someone because of their drug use. This kind of diversion program, when successful, not only assists people who use drugs find help, it can begin to repair the damaged relationships between the community and police.

While we support giving law enforcement the flexibility to support people who need help, we want to make sure we do not create a system that unintentionally sets up a process where people **MUST** interact with law enforcement in order to get the care they need. The services described in the bill already exist outside a criminal justice or law enforcement setting, just not in sufficient amounts. Research clearly demonstrates that when services are readily available in the community, people are more likely to seek help.

Maryland needs to increase its investments in crisis response services, mobile treatment, peer recovery specialists, harm reduction strategies, and recovery support services. We believe giving police the ability to work with people who use drugs in a way that is much more public health focused is good public policy.

We ask for a favorable report for HB 271.

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.