



SB 12 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services and Public Safety Answering Points – Modifications

Committee: Finance

Date: January 25, 2022

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a loved one with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly supports SB 12, which would seek to limit the use of law enforcement in behavioral health crises.

SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, published in 2020 “Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practices Toolkit.” One of the key recommendations in the toolkit is that the involvement of law enforcement in behavioral health crises be minimal. The report states that mobile crisis units should:

“Respond without law enforcement accompaniment unless special circumstances warrant inclusion in order to support true justice system diversion.” (p. 18)

There is every reason to limit the use of law enforcement in behavioral health crises:

- The presence of law enforcement can make a person in a behavioral health crisis more agitated;
- People with behavior health disorders are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system if law enforcement becomes involved;
- Law enforcement officers’ time can be better spent elsewhere.

Unfortunately, some mobile crisis teams in Maryland are required to be accompanied by law enforcement. In October of 2021, MCF surveyed families on their use of crisis services for children and youth experiencing a behavioral health crisis, and heard families concerns about the presence of law enforcement when they reached out for help from a mobile crisis team (Listening and Learning from Families: Crisis Services and the Experiences of Families Caring for Children and Youth with Behavioral Health Needs, MCF, December 2021). One parent said:

“We had only positive interactions with the Mobile Crisis Team. I just wish

we could have had them come independent of the police.”

Another parent said:

*“I think the crisis team was great and being able to come out and help with the situation.
What did not help was having a cop have to come also.”*

Finally, one caregiver advised:

*“I think there should be a way that a parent or guardian can call for a crisis response
without having to have the cops involved every time.”*

We at MCF believe that family voice should matter when establishing policies. Clearly families prefer that law enforcement not accompany a mobile crisis team when a family reaches out for help. Moreover, this sentiment aligns with SAMHSA’s best practices. SB 12, by incentivizing crisis services that do not involve law enforcement, is a great start to address the problem.

Therefore we urge a favorable report on SB 12.

Contact: Ann Geddes
Director of Public Policy
The Maryland Coalition of Families
10632 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 234
Columbia, Maryland 21044
Phone: 443-926-3396
ageddes@mdcoalition.org