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Legislative District 47  
Prince George's County

Finance Committee  
Energy and Public Utilities Subcommittee



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Senate Chair, Joint Committee on the  
Management of Public Funds

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

1/25/22

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley  
Chairwoman, Senate Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: SB12 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services and Public Safety Answering Points –  
Modifications**

Position: **Favorable**

Chair Kelley and Members of the Committee,

**The Problem:**

- Without adequate behavioral health services, the responsibility of responding to individuals with mental illness or substance use disorder has largely fallen on law enforcement. 10-20% of police encounters involve someone showing signs of mental illness or a substance use disorder<sup>1</sup> **and 1 in 4 individuals with a mental illness have been arrested at some point in their lives.**<sup>2</sup>
- Those with untreated mental illness are **16x more likely to be killed during police contact** compared with the general population<sup>3</sup> and these outcomes are 40% more likely in small and mid-sized areas.<sup>4</sup> **This reality can prevent those in crisis and their loved ones from seeking help altogether.**
- A 2021 poll revealed that **nearly half of Americans would not feel safe calling 911** if they or a loved one was experiencing a behavioral health crisis - **even despite favorable opinions of law enforcement in their own communities.**<sup>5</sup> Those with an existing mental health condition were most likely to report not feeling safe calling 911.
- **Response standards for handling crisis calls vary considerably** across Maryland's cities and counties, particularly surrounding which situations warrant the dispatch of law enforcement.

<sup>1</sup> Watson AC, Morabito MS, Draine J, Ottati V. Improving police response to persons with mental illness: a multi-level conceptualization of CIT. *Int J Law Psychiatry*. 2008;31(4):359-368. doi:10.1016/j.ijlp.2008.06.004

<sup>2</sup> Livingston J. Contact Between Police and People With Mental Disorders: A Review of Rates. *Psychiatric Services*. 15 Apr 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201500312>

<sup>3</sup> Treatment Advocacy Center. Overlooked in the Undercounted. Dec 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/overlooked-in-the-undercounted.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Kindy K, Tate J, Jenkins J, Mellnik T. Fatal police shootings of mentally ill people are 39 percent more likely to take place in small and midsized areas. *The Washington Post*. 17 Oct 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-mentally-ill-deaths/2020/10/17/8dd5bcf6-0245-11eb-b7ed-141dd88560ea\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-mentally-ill-deaths/2020/10/17/8dd5bcf6-0245-11eb-b7ed-141dd88560ea_story.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ipsos. NAMI 988 crisis Response Research. Nov 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Public%20Policy/NAMI-988-Crisis-Response-Report-11-12-2021-For-Release.pdf>

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## THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

- Despite containing a definition for “mobile crisis teams,”<sup>6</sup> **Maryland Code does not reflect the language of best practices** outlined by NAMI and SAMHSA, which is to divert those in crisis from unnecessary interaction with law enforcement.<sup>7,8</sup>

### What SB12 does:

- Requires proposals for behavioral health crisis funding to **include response standards that minimize law enforcement interaction.**
- Amends the definition of “mobile crisis teams” to **reflect the ultimate goal of diversion.**
- Requires all public safety answering points to **develop written policies for behavioral health crisis calls**, including how calls are triaged and how dispatch decisions are made.
- Requires these written policies be made **available to the Maryland Department of Health and to the public.**

### How SB12 helps:

- Provides **transparency to neighboring jurisdictions** to better coordinate crisis response.
- Provides **transparency to the public** regarding what may happen if 911 is called.
- Supports broader efforts to **decriminalize and destigmatize mental illness.**

**Chair Kelley and members of the committee, I ask for your favorable report.**

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<sup>6</sup> Md. Code Ann., Health – General § 7.5-208 and 10-1401(g). 2021.

<sup>7</sup> National Alliance on mental Illness (NAMI). Divert to What? Community Services That Enhance Diversion. Retrieved from: <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Publications-Reports/Public-Policy-Reports/Divert-to-What-Community-Services-that-Enhance-Diversion/DiverttoWhat.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care: Best Practice Toolkit. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>