



MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

HB 129

Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services and Public Safety Answering Points – Modifications
House Health & Government Operations Committee. January 26, 2022

SUPPORT

HB 129 would incentivize behavioral health crisis response programs to minimize law enforcement interaction for individuals in crisis, through grant proposals and policies & procedures.

Minimizing unneeded law enforcement interaction is a key to successful crisis services for behavioral health. As crisis services grow, encouragement and incentives will be needed for the development of protocols to rapidly dispatch the appropriate service in real time.

Established crisis response programs reduce law enforcement interaction as appropriate.

The best-established program to divert behavioral health calls is in Eugene, Oregon. Denver's program is over a year old, Orlando's is over six months old with "great results." The new Albuquerque Community Safety Department has been operating since September. New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington DC have recently begun pilot programs.

(Source: 'In New Mexico, a bold experiment aims to take police out of the equation for mental health calls' Oct 9, 2021, Washington Post)

SAMHSA'S 2020 National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit

(Substance abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) noted that:

"... costs of law enforcement ... dedicating disproportionate resources to address issues that result from a person's untreated crisis" is an "exorbitant price" of not offering crisis care that we cannot afford to pay. . .

"In too many communities, the crisis system has been unofficially handed over to law enforcement, sometimes with devastating outcomes. . . Also,

"Incarceration for misdemeanor offences represents a failure in responding to those in need."

The report noted that a **Mobile Crisis Team 'Best Practice' is to "Respond without law enforcement unless special circumstances warrant inclusion in order to support true justice system diversion."**

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Joseph A. Adams, MD, FASAM; Chair, Public Policy Committee