



HB129 - SUPPORT

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**HB129 - SUPPORT
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE SERVICES
AND PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS - MODIFICATIONS**

Health and Government Committee

January 26, 2022

Dear Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melynk, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Holly Syrrakos and I represent Takoma Park Mobilization, an advocacy organization with a following of over 2,500, active in environmental, justice, economic, and electoral matters. We are in SUPPORT of HB129.

HB129 provides the framework for public safety offices, insuring there are statewide standards requiring each jurisdiction to minimize law enforcement interaction with individuals experiencing an acute mental health crisis. In Montgomery County we are too aware of the need for this legislation as, in the past two years, three men—Finan Berhe (2020), Kevin Costlow (2021), and Ryan Leroux (2021)—who were experiencing a mental health crisis, were killed by Montgomery County police.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program must require response standards that include procedures to screen a call, understand resources available for dispatch and procedures for making a dispatch decision. The role of the emergency call center is key to the deployment of a mental health team. Montgomery County is funding a significant expansion of the number of mental health crisis teams; triage and dispatch needs to be revamped accordingly. State legislation to that effect strengthens this crucial change in procedures, policies, and staffing.

Those suffering an active mental health crisis and their families should not be in fear of calling for assistance. They need to be assured they will receive compassionate, trauma-informed, and appropriate care from well-trained mental health staff and peers, and that the engagement of law enforcement in such crises will be limited.

We urge a favorable report on HB129.