

HB1176 - Public Safety - Voluntary 9-1-1 Registry

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Kim Tart. I have resided in Prince Georges County for over 50 years. My husband and I are proud parents of Monty who is diagnosed with Down Syndrome.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB1176. This bill provides our first responders with important information to protect and serve all of our neighbors.

We are Monty's "voice" and his connection to the community.... his connection to society. Our son has 3 strikes against him – he is male, his is black and his has a disability.

If I am able to connect with my county's 9-1-1 call center, I can share pertinent information about Monty's disability that can keep him safe.

Dialing 9-1-1 is the most familiar and effective way Americans have of finding help in an emergency. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires all Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) to provide direct, equal access to their services for people with disabilities who use teletypewriters (TTYs), which are also known as "telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs)." Why not enhance 9-1-1 service to alert first responders of certain diagnoses or certain behaviors or traits that individuals may present during encounters with first responders?

This bill will benefit many more groups of people, but I see how critical it is for this bill to be enacted, because of the behavioral and mental health challenges some of the individuals with disabilities have. Interacting with strangers – especially those who may have limited experience or sensitivity with our population – can be disastrous.

This bill is a commonsense approach to ensure all of our residents receive the best support possible – even in dynamic times and periods of crisis. Sometimes split decisions and even life-changing decisions have to happen with first responders and it is clear that having key information about behaviors, abilities, disabilities, anxieties and special needs is a serious matter that needs our action.

With HB1176, the phrase "knowledge is power" is extremely true. I love that the bill gives people and guardians the ability to decide each year what information would be helpful for first responders to know before approaching someone's home.

I ask that you move HB1176 with a favorable report to make sure our first responders are equipped to serve and support all Maryland residents. Thank you for your support.

Kim J. Tart

Kim Tart
Proud Mom of Montgomery "Monty" Tart