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Budget and Taxation Committee

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Capital Budget

Pensions

Chair, Public Safety,  
Transportation, and Environment

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and  
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Chair, Joint Subcommittee on  
Program Open Space/Agricultural  
Land Preservation

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 1, 2023

**Testimony in Favor of SB0580**  
**Public Safety - Officer and Community Wellness Training Grant Fund**

Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, & members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 580 to establish an Office and Community Wellness Training Grant Fund within the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services (GOCPYVS). This grant program would support local law enforcement agencies so they can provide Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety Training (MHFAPS) and Critical Incident Stress Management Peer Support Training (CISM).

The idea for this legislation originated from wanting to find a way to better incentivize our law enforcement officers to participate in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT). However, after discussions with Anne Arundel County's director of our world-renowned CIT training program, incentivizing officers for such training is not the best strategy as a key pillar of such training is fully believing in its principles and benefits without the need for incentivization.

However, from that conversation it became clear that we can and should do more to:

1. Train our officers to respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders that they experience in their service (MHFAPS)
2. Support our law enforcement officers after experience in a critical incident (CISM).

MHFAPS training teaches how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This training gives an officer the skills needed to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use challenge and help connect them to the appropriate care<sup>1</sup>. This type of training – and most

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022\\_MHFA\\_For\\_Public\\_Safety.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022_MHFA_For_Public_Safety.pdf)

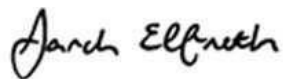
importantly the critical de-escalation and support mechanisms – has the opportunity to save lives if we can train more officers.

CISM training<sup>2</sup> is more focused on how to support our officers that experience occupational stressors through critically important peer support. This type of support and training has the ability to not only allow our officers to serve to the greatest of their ability but will also help us further retain our dedicated law enforcement personnel.

Furthermore, Maryland has been a world-wide leader on CISM training and today you will hear from Dr. George Everly from Johns Hopkins University who has been leading on this effort and, who in partnership with Lt. Steven Thomas (who you will also hear from today), provided such support to those in the aftermath of the Capital Gazette mass shooting (academic article attached).

I believe that this legislation will ensure that our officers and the public are more safe and I once again respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 580.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Elfreth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Elfreth

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0942-pub.pdf>