



Senate Bill 580

Public Safety – Officer and Community Wellness Training Grant Fund

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: March 29, 2023

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 580. This bill supports training for local law enforcement agencies to best respond to, and support, their residents' mental health needs.

SB 580 can help provide local law enforcement agencies with resources to update practices and training protocols for interactions with people experiencing a mental health crisis. These efforts would include expanded mental health first aid training, thus ensuring an even greater likelihood that an emergency situation will not unfold in a harmful way for either party. This type of training will allow officers to better identify an individual's needs in situations where those needs might not be obvious or the individual is unable to communicate them - whether because they're actively in crisis or may not yet understand their condition themselves.

Additionally, the funds can be used for training officers on how to identify and communicate with co-workers when peer support is needed. Regular exposure to tense and sometimes traumatic environments can result in adverse mental health and physical symptoms from an incident that took place in the line of duty. The peer support training outlined in the bill will enable law enforcement officers to protect not just residents in need, but themselves and one other.

Law enforcement readily put themselves in circumstances where the mental health needs of an individual might not be obvious or visible to the untrained eye. SB 580 wisely targets this as a primary concern, and provides important resources to promote best outcomes in such difficult encounters. For these reasons, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 580.