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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

**BILL: HB 1066 – Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access –
Membership and Workgroups**

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 3/3/2025

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on HB 1066.

Successful behavioral health interventions are the goal of both voluntary and court-ordered treatment. Understanding the differences in outcomes, and how they are affected by the mode of entry will help ensure that the Commission can recommend the most appropriate means of entry into behavioral health systems.

It is already known that court-ordered treatment leads to varied outcomes which largely correlate with race. Black and Hispanic referrals are less likely to complete programs and are more likely to face further incarceration than their white counterparts. Without understanding how or if those outcomes differ when a person enters treatment voluntarily, it is impossible to create an appropriate framework designed to encourage effective and equitable positive results.

House Bill 1066 expands the purview of a Commission that already operates and meets regularly. The Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access already conducts studies regarding availability and access to treatment and recovery support but does not examine how individuals enter this system. This bill would allow the Commission to study the differences in points of entry to behavioral health care systems as well as how those differences affect outcomes. Understanding these differences is necessary for the Commission to provide appropriate guidance over where resources are best used in behavioral health care systems.

Importantly, individuals who may need higher-level or more complex treatment supports are subject to coerced intervention and treatment ordered through specialty courts, criminal courts, and probation services throughout the state without any evidence that it is an effective method of treatment delivery. Courts are unable and reluctant to break this pattern without supporting evidence. Defense and State attorneys also are reluctant to seek other modes of treatment. Under HB 1066, this Commission will be able to provide information to all stake holders in the Behavioral Health Systems the knowledge they need to meet care recipients in the places where they are most likely to find success.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1066.

**Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.
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