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Testimony for HB 1119 – As a social worker I am very concerned, removing the authority of LCSW-Cs to petition for emergency evaluations (EPs) undermines the State’s goal of reducing law enforcement involvement in behavioral health crises. Rather than diverting individuals away from police contact, this change would force Mobile Response Teams (MRTs) and other crisis providers to rely on law enforcement to initiate EPs—ultimately increasing police presence in situations best managed by trained behavioral health clinicians.

This shift also risks the loss of billable opportunities for mobile crisis services. When law enforcement is present during an evaluation, concerns about coercion may arise, potentially invalidating billing for services and placing additional financial strain on an already challenged behavioral health system. Further, transferring EP decision-making solely to law enforcement—who lack the clinical training required for comprehensive behavioral health risk assessments—may reduce appropriate diversions from higher levels of care and unintentionally drive up emergency department use. Delays in clinical assessments could heighten client risk and slow access to needed inpatient or crisis stabilization services.

Therapists would also become dependent on law enforcement to complete EPs for their own clients, limiting the inclusion of critical clinical information necessary to support inpatient placement decisions. This fragmentation erodes continuity of care and compromises clinical integrity.

Finally, the proposed legislation would increase financial burdens by requiring greater reliance on physicians, nurse practitioners, or other providers to perform functions currently carried out by LCSW-Cs. It would also create a professional disparity between LCSW-Cs and LCPCs, worsening workforce shortages as crisis and community-based programs compete for an even smaller pool of qualified clinicians. At a time when Maryland is striving to strengthen and expand its behavioral health workforce, this proposal would move the system in the opposite direction.