

Testimony in Opposition to Bill 43-23
CIT Crisis Intervention Team Established
January 16, 2023, Public Hearing

My name is Joan Butler, I live in Rockville, MD and have a family member with mental illness. Therefore, this topic is near and dear to my heart.

I am here to testify in opposition to Bill 43-23 which proposes a “co-responder crisis response model” specifically related to a police presence on the team. This proposed bill is not appropriate for our county, which is comprised of a diverse population of constituents, and many fear police.

In 2022, the County shared its plans for improving the county’s mental health crisis response which included the addition of mobile crisis teams. These mobile teams consist of support from a mental health specialist and a clinician, and ensure the flexibility to respond alone or, if necessary, with a separate police presence. Once there is low or no risk of danger, police can leave to focus on their many other required duties.

I strongly recommend the County continues using this model of sending a crisis team and police independently from one another. This allows two mental health professionals (clinician and peer support specialist) to focus on the needs of the person in crisis, which can take hours.

A person in a mental health crisis needs a mental health response, rather than a law enforcement response that can result in causing fear and trauma in the patient and ultimately can lead to tragedy (Irwin & Pearl, October 2020). A joint report issued by The Center for American Progress (CAP) and the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP) (2014) estimate that between 23 to 39% of mental health related calls are low-risk situations that can be managed successfully by a Mobile Crisis Team solely, without a police presence. This indicates that our County can benefit from more mobile crisis teams.

In cases where police are required, police can and should remain on the periphery. This is because contact with law enforcement can easily exacerbate the symptoms of a person experiencing a mental health crisis. HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Report (SAMHSA, 2020, p. 1) has stated “Over 2 million people with serious mental illness (SMI) are booked into jail each year, often for non-violent “nuisance” or “quality of life” crimes such as loitering and vagrancy. Not surprisingly, the prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorder (SUD) are 3 to 4 times that of the general population. Once in jail, “people with SMI are incarcerated twice as long, and few receive needed treatment.”

Thank you for your time.

REFERENCES

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