

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony on Bill 42-23. As the mother of a son who has struggled with severe mental illness for the past twenty years, I am concerned about the involvement of police presence in a crisis situation. Not all mental health crises are a situation where the individual or others are at risk of harm. And the person making the call should be able to let someone know if they believe law enforcement is necessary. I know for my son, the presence of police would have likely caused him to be more afraid and reactive, when the goal is to be calming and de-escalating. We have MCOT teams available and they should be the ones handling situations that do not need police assistance. Montgomery County currently sends police with MCOT when the crisis involves "significant risk of harm" to the person in crisis or others on the scene.

I oppose this bill because added police presence and use-of-force for people who have mental illness is unnecessary and unacceptable. AI have heard too many horror stories where individuals end up in our County jails or State psychiatric facilities because police showed up and the situation quickly escalated. And for those individuals, they end up in a living hell and do not get the treatment needed. There are myriad crisis intervention and peer support programs in our country where trained professional teams provide the appropriate intervention with excellent outcomes.

There is a best practice guide from NAMI National and CIT International which strongly cautions against having police presence on all crisis calls because "law enforcement policies can dictate the response. For example, (they) may strongly encourage transporting an individual... which could override the mental health professional's preference to leave a person at home with their natural supports and a plan for follow-up." Again, this is a recipe for disaster if the individual ends up in the criminal justice system where we know mental illness is not treated and they suffer far more being with the general prison population, and they are often denied what they need to get better.

Our County resources are limited, and it would be better to use our taxpayer money to improve and expand our MCOT system, and invest in programs that decriminalize mental illness and provide better treatment resources.

I appreciate your consideration of my testimony, and hope that you will strongly consider opposition to this bill and focus attention on better ways to serve those in our community who struggle with mental illness.

Respectfully submitted,

Mimi Brodsky Kress