

Bill 43-23 Crisis Intervention Team – Established

Montgomery County Council

January 16, 2024

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Bill 48-23.

Bill 48-23 establishes a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) as a joint program of the Montgomery County Police Department and the County Department of Health and Human Services. CIT is a law enforcement-led, team-based intervention to divert individuals experiencing behavioral health crises away from the criminal justice system and into treatment. It results in less lethal interactions, better outcomes and increased safety for all involved. Per the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program has become a globally recognized model for safely and effectively assisting people with mental and substance use disorders who experience crises in the community. The CIT Model promotes strong community partnerships among law enforcement, behavioral health providers, people with mental and substance use disorders, along with their families and others.¹

Consumer and family advocates have been working for years to expand access to CIT programs across Maryland, a policy goal endorsed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2020 with the passage of [SB 305](#). That bill, which passed unanimously in the Senate and nearly unanimously in the House, established a [CIT Center of Excellence](#) to assist local jurisdictions in developing, evaluating and improving CIT programs across Maryland. Bill 48-23 is an important step in aligning with these goals.

However, it is important to note that CIT is just one part of a robust continuum of community behavioral health services. Mobile crisis teams, crisis phone lines, and other treatment-linked community resources are essential to reducing criminal justice system involvement for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders. Bill 48-23 helps in this aspect too by requiring the establishment and enhancement of a sequential intercept model (SIM) in Montgomery County.

¹ *Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Methods for Using Data to Inform Practice: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-5065.pdf>

SIM was developed to help communities identify ways to address the disproportionate number of people with behavioral health issues in the criminal justice system across six key “intercepts” at which people with behavioral health needs come into contact with and flow through the criminal justice system. By engaging in the SIM process, jurisdictions assess resources and determine critical service gaps; identify opportunities to divert individuals from justice system involvement into alternative treatment services; forge partnerships between different agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions; introduce practitioners to evidence-based practices; enhance relationships across systems and agencies; and create customized plans for community change.²

Furthering a SIM framework in jurisdictions across Maryland is another longtime priority for behavioral health consumer and family advocates, and it is another goal that has been endorsed by the state legislature. In 2021 the General Assembly passed [SB 857/ HB 1280](#), with unanimous approval in both chamber, establishing the [Maryland Behavioral Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence](#). Assisting jurisdictions in developing localized SIMs is a primary responsibility of this Center of Excellence.

Bill 48-23 will establish programs in Montgomery County that are designed to divert individuals experiencing behavioral health crises away from the criminal justice system. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill.

² *Maryland’s Behavioral Health and Public Safety Center of Excellence Strategic Plan*. University of Maryland Crime Research and Innovation Center, September 2023.
https://bsos.umd.edu/sites/bsos.umd.edu/files/EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY_BH_PS_CoE.pdf