

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO BILL 43-23, CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM - ESTABLISHED
Hearing date: January 16, 2024

We are an active group of concerned citizens (40 families), focusing on the needs of family members with special needs. Our group, POSNA (Parents of Special Needs Adults) began in July 2015 by Mary Jane Muchui, of Takoma Park, as an informal support group for people in Takoma Park who are responsible for adult children with special needs. These grown children are diagnosed with different abilities caused by autism and severe psychiatric illness, etc

Public Safety has been a long-standing concern for our members. We recently learned that legislation (bill 43-23) has been proposed & it will interrupt the progress on establishing more "**Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams**" (MCOT). Currently, MoCo has 3 MCOT units. The original plan was for 8 units in total. The County needs to focus on fully implementing the MCOT system as originally conceived. This is not the time for the Council to mandate a separate system.

We understand that State and Federal guidelines support the MCOT model. The state's **Department of Health** and the federal **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA) endorse the use of MCOTs to respond to mental health crises.

We support efforts to limit the number of emergency vehicles showing up for a Mental Illness Crisis call. The shining lights & glossy official badges will heighten anxiety, instead of creating a calming situation.

Recent news in Washington DC has once again brought this issue to the forefront. On Jan. 24, 2024, Clifford Brooks (41), of NE Wash, DC killed by an officer following a mental health crisis call. One of the responding officers was a trained Crisis Intervention Officer & spent nearly two hours with Brooks after which Brooks decided to go to an area hospital. The rest of the story is told vividly in the news sequencing the events leading up to the killing.

Just imagine if the response team had included MCOT Clinicians & Peer Support Specialists to ride along in the ambulance & keep the situation from escalating? This would have provided the necessary care & allowed the police to leave to go onto other calls.

While we are pleased that CIT is part of police training, it can't take the place of Social Workers and Peer Specialists. These specialists know how to communicate with people with mental disabilities.

"Communication is important for everyone faced with an emergency. It is especially important for people with disabilities that may affect their ability to communicate. Those with disabilities may have extra difficulty expressing themselves. Sometimes people with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities will seem to understand what you said in an attempt to fit in and not be a "complainer" even when they don't totally comprehend." (TP newsletter Aug 2019).

The CIT team proposed in the bill would unnecessarily tie up law enforcement and clinician resources while not providing the benefits of Peer Support Specialists. We oppose Bill 43-23.

~Peggy Walsh Edwards, of Takoma Park, MD, POSNA administrator.