



SB 305 – Public Safety – Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Date: February 11, 2020

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to parents and caregivers of young people with mental health issues and to any loved one who cares for someone with a substance use or gambling issue.

MCF held focus groups with families who had accessed mental health crisis services for their child. In a crisis, families frequently call 911 and law enforcement responds.

In the focus groups, we heard of families having wonderful experiences with officers, who were well-trained to intervene in a crisis situation. They were successfully able to de-escalate the situation, and frequently their expertise resulted in the child not needing to go to the emergency department. We also heard stories of officers who were ill-equipped to address the mental health crisis. Sometimes they would arrest the child who was displaying out-of-control, aggressive behavior. One parent said “I called 911, so now we a parole officer.” Another parent reported that a police officer arrived and within ten seconds had tased her son.

We asked families: “Did you feel that the presence of the police was helpful to address the crisis?” Of the 28 families who reported having used the police, 16 families answered “yes,” and 12 families answered “no.” Participants came from across the state, and there were variable answers within jurisdictions.

SB 305 would support the development of more officers who are well-trained in mental health and substance use crisis intervention. It would result in greater consistency in training of officers across the state, with better outcomes for those experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. In addition, it would improve the training of others who engage with individuals in a behavioral health crisis, or support those that do.

We urge a favorable report on SB 305.

Contact: Ann Geddes
Director of Public Policy
The Maryland Coalition of Families
10632 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 234
Columbia, Maryland 21044
Phone: 443-741-8668
ageddes@mdcoalition.org