



On Our Own of Maryland, Inc.

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 1470 WITH AMENDMENTS

First Responders- Mandatory Mental Health Training

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 10, 2020**

On Our Own of Maryland supports HB 1470's goal of requiring all first responders in Maryland to complete mental health awareness training. However, we respectfully suggest *four important points of amendment*:

- 1) We emphasize the need for consumer input into any required behavioral health training.** The current bill requires the mandatory mental health awareness training to be approved by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission and the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems. It is essential for an organization with consumer input to be involved in the approval process; we recommend the Behavioral Health Criminal Justice Partnership (BHCJP).

- 2) Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training is an evidence-based practice used across the country to improve the relationship between law enforcement and those with behavioral health needs.**^{1,2,3,4} These programs have been proven effective at increasing officer confidence and ability to de-escalate crisis situations. CIT programs lead to reduced arrests, decreased costs, decreased jail days and increased mental health treatment. Effective intervention requires at least 25% of officers in each jurisdiction to be CIT trained, which includes 40 hours of behavioral health training.⁵ **We strongly emphasize the necessity of requiring the implementation of CIT programs statewide in order to achieve results.**

- 3) We emphasize the importance of indicating a standard length of time for the required training.** Other states that have implemented mandatory mental health training for first-responders have indicated a length of required training, such as eight hours. Some states also require an annual two-hour refresher course. We recommend remaining cognizant of these matters of practicality on this bill.

4) **We strongly emphasize the need for this training to focus on behavioral health, defined as mental health and substance use.** Maryland as a state is currently in the process of moving toward an entirely integrated system, and this needs to be considered in any legislation going forward around this issue.

We strongly urge the committee to support HB 1470 with the amendments above.

On Our Own of Maryland (OOOMD) is a state-wide behavioral health consumer education and advocacy organization that has been in operation for more than 25 years. We are comprised of current or former recipients of mental health and substance use services and we represent 23 behavioral health peer-operated Wellness and Recovery Centers throughout Maryland. We are organized in order to improve access to competent, respectful, and effective recovery-based treatment, services, and supports, as well as to promote quality of life for everyone with behavioral health needs, especially for people who are underserved and marginalized. We provide training, technical assistance, and advocacy support to our statewide network of peer-run programs in an effort to ensure the sustainability of nonprofit entities that foster equality, autonomy and choice for behavioral health service recipients.

1. Watson & Compton. (2019). What research on crisis intervention teams tell us and what we need to ask. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 47 (4), 422-426. DOI: 10.29158/JAAPL.003894-19
2. Comartin, Swanson, & Kubiak. (2019). Mental health crisis location and police transportation decisions: The impact of crisis intervention team training on crisis center utilization. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 35 (2), 241-260. DOI: 10.1177/10439862191836595
3. Ritter, Teller, Marcussen, Munetz, & Teasdale. (2010). *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 34, 30-38. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2010.11.005
4. Franz & Borum. (2011). Crisis Intervention Teams may prevent arrests of people with mental illnesses. *Police Practice and Research* 12 (3), 265-272. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2010.497664
5. Comartin, Swanson, & Kubiak. (2019).