

House Bill 1470 First Responders – Mandatory Mental Health Training

Judiciary Committee

March 10, 2020

Position: LETTER OF INFORMATION

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, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate the opportunity to present this letter of information regarding House Bill 1470.

HB 1470 requires first responders to complete mental health awareness training approved by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC) and the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)

MHAMD has worked for years to expand mental health training to law enforcement and first responders. Much of this work has been in collaboration with MPTSC. There continues to be a number of ongoing efforts and a high level of commitment from everyone involved.

Legislation in 2005 established the Maryland Mental Health and Criminal Justice Partnership to improve services and break the cycle of rearrest and reincarceration for people with mental illness that become involved in the criminal justice system. MHAMD chairs that group, which has since been reconstituted as the Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Partnership (BHCJP). The Partnership continues to meet today, 13 years after its legislative mandate ended. The group is comprised of representatives from state agencies, local behavioral health authorities, local law enforcement, correctional administrators, advocates, mental health and substance use providers, members of the judiciary, and more. We've made a lot of progress in a number of areas, including police training.

A BHCJP training committee collaborated with MPTSC years ago to improve behavioral health training curricula for police, correctional officers and parole and probation officers. Eight new training objectives were identified to improve understanding of and response to behavioral health issues. MPTSC approved the objectives in December 2009, allowing related courses to count toward the required minimum training hours. We then collaborated with MPTSC to identify and approve curricula meeting the new objectives and created a mechanism to track usage of these training modules. As noted in the fiscal note, MPTSC now requires, as part of its entrance-level training, information regarding individuals with psychiatric disabilities; and it requires in-service training related to antidiscrimination and use of force de-escalation training.

BHCJP also has a Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) Committee, which has been working since 2013 to expand these law enforcement-led, team-based community partnerships to jurisdictions

across the state. We've developed a set of core CIT standards, held a series of regional relationship-building forums for law enforcement and mental health professionals, outreached to local jurisdictions to assist with implementation, and worked with MPTSC and the Behavioral Health Administration to organize a first-of-its-kind CIT Train the Trainer to build an expertise and capacity in Maryland that will allow for more regional and local CIT training. Nearly every jurisdiction now has some CIT capacity, up from just five a couple of years ago.

MHAMD has also worked to facilitate Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for corrections, parole and probation, and law enforcement personnel throughout Maryland. Over 7,200 public safety professionals throughout the state have been trained in this world-renowned public health program, which teaches individuals to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. MPTSC was one of the first in the nation to offer education credit for the program. The Southern Maryland Criminal Justice Academy and other law enforcement entities have made MHFA a mandatory training; the Anne Arundel County Detention Center and other corrections facilities now include MHFA in their training academies; and the Harford County Sheriff's Department (HCSD) requires MHFA as a new hire orientation training for both sworn and civilian staff, and as a pre-requisite for other training or special team applications.

These are just a few of the ongoing and worthwhile initiatives in Maryland related to mental health training for law enforcement. The mental health community is fortunate to have MPTSC as a partner, and we look forward to a continued collaboration.