



House Health & Government Operations Committee
January 26, 2022

**House Bill 129
Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services and Public Safety Answering Points –
Modifications
Support**

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, the number of opioid-related deaths increased by 20% between 2019 and 2020, and preliminary data indicates a continued increase in 2021.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports House Bill 129 to promote reduced police presence in behavioral health crisis response services.

Through the existing Behavioral Health Crisis Services grant program, the Behavioral Health Administration has been able to support a number of local programs, including increasing staffing for walk-in crisis centers, expanding existing mobile crisis services to be 24-hours instead of overnight, and expanding crisis services to include substance use disorder peer support, system navigation, and urgent psychiatric appointments.

With the increase in the number of deaths due to overdoses, Maryland must be bold in its response. There are multiple policy approaches and programming that would have a direct result of saving people's lives. Reducing police presence in substance use and mental health crises will mean interventions will be conducted through more of a public health lens. There is a tremendous amount of mistrust of police. Appropriately responding to crises with a behavioral health team instead of police will make people more willing to ask for and receive help.

We urge your support of House Bill 129.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.