

November 8, 2019

Executive Summary of Bazelon Center and Disability Rights Maryland Comments on Recent Baltimore Public Health System Gap Analysis

On Friday, November 1, 2019, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and Disability Rights Maryland [submitted comments](#) on a [report analyzing gaps in Baltimore, Maryland's behavioral health system](#). The report is a requirement of the [2017 Consent Decree between the U.S. Department of Justice and the City of Baltimore, Maryland, and the Baltimore Police Department \(BPD\)](#). The Consent Decree resolves the Justice Department's claims that the BPD violates the constitutional and civil rights of Baltimore residents, including people of color and people with disabilities, through the excessive use of force; racially discriminatory stops, searches, and arrests; and the failure to make reasonable accommodations when responding to calls involving people with disabilities and in crisis.

[The gap analysis report](#), which was conducted by Human Services Research International (HSRI), recommends that Baltimore expand and enhance services available in its public health system, to help reduce unnecessary and inappropriate interactions between BPD officers and people with disabilities, in Baltimore predominantly Black and Latinx people with disabilities. The Bazelon Center and Disability Rights Maryland believe that the report's recommendations are sound overall, and [make the following suggestions for implementation](#):

- Baltimore's behavioral health crisis response system should be expanded and improved, with a goal of vastly reducing BPD involvement in behavioral health crisis calls.
- Baltimore's behavioral health system must be expanded and improved so that residents can access effective community-based services, including permanent supported housing, that have been shown to reduce behavioral health crisis calls and criminal system involvement.
- To be effective, Baltimore's behavioral health services must be culturally competent, non-discriminatory, and result in improved life outcomes. The system must seek and meaningfully include input from the community in achieving these goals.
- All BPD officers should receive crisis intervention team (CIT) training for how to respond to behavioral health crisis calls, but resources for such training should not be taken away from those needed for expansion and improvement of Baltimore's behavioral health system.

For more information about the Bazelon Center's comments on the Baltimore behavioral health system gap analysis, please contact Senior Staff Attorney Lewis Bossing at lewisb@bazelon.org or (202) 467-5730 x1307.