

Council President Friedson, and members of the Council, good afternoon. For the record, my name is Stephanie Helsing, and I am President & CEO of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce.

I'm here today in support of Bill 43-23 Crisis Intervention Team-Established. In short, the main reason for supporting this bill, is that it is about public safety for all, and our current approach is not as effective as we need it to be.

As you know, the Chamber has always been about making Silver Spring a thriving business community, a place where people want to live, work, and come to enjoy what so many of us love about Silver Spring – our wonderful arts and entertainment venues, our breweries, and our “United Nations” of restaurants.

But the visible increase in the unhoused population in downtown Silver Spring, many with evident mental health concerns, and the incidents connected with some of these individuals, has our community, including the businesses, concerned. I know there are folks working tirelessly to address this, but the reality is we are still hearing from our businesses and property owners about the negative impacts.

Sadly, this situation is not unique to us, but here is where we live and work.

The Chamber believes that Crisis Intervention Teams, or CIT's, and co-response programs are the most impactful and recognized best practices to address, specifically, what is happening in Silver Spring. Pairing clinicians with highly trained law enforcement allows for a better response to mental and behavioral health crisis and ensures the safety of all involved.

Most people have already been impacted or will be impacted by mental/behavioral health challenges – whether it's themselves or their loved one. Businesses are no exception. I think it is fair to say that we can all get behind reducing the stigma, connecting people with services, increasing partnership, and promoting public health and safety with dignity, understanding, kindness and hope.

To Dr. Stoddard's point earlier, progress has been made,` and this bill is another step toward a safer environment for everyone to enjoy. As the Chamber understands it, this bill is a way to supplement the work the County is already doing in this space. We know we need more, and we know there are

situations in which police officers are being called repeatedly to address individuals facing significant challenges, taking them out of circulation to deal with criminal activity.

So, as the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, we want to use our platform to advocate for this needed expansion of services to support our community members - our friends, colleagues, and neighbors – who are living with mental and behavioral health challenges. We want our community to succeed. And we believe that assuring a safe and welcoming environment for everyone is key to a thriving business community, a thriving Silver Spring, and a thriving Montgomery County. Safe for those who live here, who work here, and who come here to enjoy the wonderful amenities we have to offer.

Thank you for your time.