



Testimony to House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing

Police Approach to Mental Health Calls August 2020

PACA MH/DS is an affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and represents the 48 county-based entities responsible for the administration of mental health and developmental disability services. We thank members of the House Democratic Policy Committee for holding a hearing on the police approach to mental health calls as our members continue to build relations with the police departments to effectively address individual situations.

Our testimony is founded upon practices that occur in various counties and acknowledges Berks County and their MH/DD Administrator Dr. Ed Michalik for offering examples of their years of continued efforts to improve relations between local police and the county mental health program. Berks County demonstrates the benefits that occur when there is a well-established, collaborative partnership with local police departments. The results are gleaned from many years of a multipronged approach based on the premise that treatment and support for individuals with behavioral health issues is a far more effective intervention than incarceration.

The partnership between police and community mental health typically begins with training for law enforcement officers. There is a myriad of training options available from beginner Mental Health First Aid and Crisis Intervention Training to highly specialized De-Escalation and Hostage Negotiation Trainings which are certified for Police Training Credits through the Municipal Police Officers Training and Education Commission (MPOTEC). To assist in building the partnership, training should extend beyond law enforcement officers to include training for dispatchers who field the initial call and set the tone for situations.

Through training, officers learn where to turn for an immediate response from mental health professionals. Reliable, immediate response from mental health professionals as situations are occurring is the second facet that makes this partnership work. Phone and Mobile Crisis Intervention Services are available 24 hours per day/7 days per week

and police departments know to contact Crisis Intervention for any situation in question. Some counties even have a forensics specialist available to outreach to mental health for various reasons which may include consultation, police requested outreach, involuntary mental health commitment, safety check, etc. In addition, debriefing with Police Department personnel after situations has also been very helpful to seeing what worked and what didn't and make any adjustments accordingly in order to move interventions forward.

Finally, thank you for this hearing as it recognizes the tough, emotionally charged environment that both disciplines, law enforcement and mental health professionals, face. Our association looks forward to reviewing the testimony given by law enforcement to better understand the best approaches for community mental health and identify other ways counties can be partners.

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