



****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

September 7th, 2021

Re: Local organizations and community advocates oppose current crisis response team model

Dear San Antonio City Leaders,

We the undersigned are urging you, as our elected city leaders, to reject the current proposal for a mobile crisis response team that includes law enforcement, and instead support a model that will ensure the meaningful change that our community wants, needs, and deserves.

Primary responders to calls involving an individual in crisis must consist of professionals who are specially trained to provide safe, effective, and compassionate care. This model is critical; per a 2015 report by the Treatment Advocacy Center, “people with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than other civilians approached or

stopped by law enforcement.” More recently, a *Washington Post* database revealed that 19% of fatal police shootings in Texas involved a victim with a history of mental illness.

Including law enforcement as a core component of a crisis response team will only continue to result in situations involving arrest, excessive force, and/or unnecessary fatalities. Instead, individuals in crisis, as well as their families, deserve to have an option that will ensure the experience necessary to de-escalate the situation, properly assess and treat the individual on-site, and connect that individual to services and treatment options in the community. Importantly, this type of response will greatly diminish the triggering and sometimes deadly effect that law enforcement can have in these situations.

Unfortunately, the crisis response model that the city is currently considering does little to address this danger and will waste valuable city resources. We urge city leaders to do the following:

- Develop a crisis response team that *only* consists of trained and experienced medical and mental health specialists who serve as the primary responders to calls involving an individual in crisis.
- Establish a clear and narrowly defined set of circumstances that warrant the presence of law enforcement. If that presence is necessary, ensure that law enforcement officers serve in a secondary role.

The CAHOOTS model in Eugene, Oregon, is one of the longest-lasting and most successful mental health mobile response units in the country. In 2019, only 311 out of the 24,000 calls for assistance ultimately involved law enforcement – roughly 1.3%. This is evidence that law enforcement is unnecessary in the majority of mental health crisis or substance abuse calls.

- Redirect any savings from diverted calls – including savings stemming from fewer jail bookings and emergency room visits – to an expansion of services unique to the varying needs of communities across San Antonio.

A cost-saving analysis from the Eugene Police Department found that CAHOOTS has saved the city **\$2.2 million in officer wages.**

A myriad of funding opportunities can support mobile mental health crisis programs. For instance, the last COVID-19 relief package included The CAHOOTS Act, which provides three years of funding to offer community-based mobile crisis services to individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder. The bill makes an investment in these services by: (1) funding state Medicaid programs at an enhanced 85% federal match if they choose to provide qualifying community-based crisis intervention services, and (2) funding state planning grants for the option. In fact, the CAHOOTS Act provides \$25 million for planning grants to states and evaluations to help establish or build mobile crisis programs and evaluate them. Other programs, such as the Denver STAR program, receive grants from both the city and nonprofit

foundations to support and expand their program. The Crisis Response Unit (CRU) in Olympia, Washington, was initially funded with \$500,000 through a public safety levy. **San Antonio has many similar funding streams and opportunities it can utilize so as not to pull resources away from other important city programs and departments.**

Finally, when it comes to developing and implementing safe, effective, and transformative alternatives to the traditional law enforcement response, **San Antonio has an opportunity to become a true Texas leader in redefining and transforming how cities address critical issues that impact their communities.** However, this can only happen if city leaders are brave enough to seize the moment.

We urge you to act with courage and create a crisis response team that can truly meet the needs of our community – with care and compassion – and can build the community’s trust.

Sincerely,

ACT 4 SA
All of Us or None Texas
Black Voters Matter Fund
Grassroots Law Project
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
MOVE Texas Action Fund
National Lawyers Guild
Neighborhoods First Alliance
People’s Parity Project - St. Mary’s University
Reliable Revolutionaries of San Antonio
San Antonio Coalition For Police Accountability
SA Stands
Southwest Workers Union
Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
Texas Fair Defense Project
Texas Organizing Project
Texas Rising
The Party for Socialism and Liberation SATX
URGE TX

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