

Milwaukee Crisis Response and Care System: A Letter from the Community

We need public health that includes harm-reduction based programs that will respond to residents with unmet mental health needs that doesn't involve police.

Dear Mayor Barrett, Alderperson, and other City Department Leadership,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, write on behalf of our communities in support of Milwaukee's non-law enforcement emergency response network. We demand that Milwaukee develop and fully implement a harm-reduction based program housed in the Milwaukee Health Department that will respond to people with unmet mental health needs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, **without the involvement of law enforcement**, that will be staffed by 100 health professionals and peer advocates paid a minimum of \$18/hour plus benefits.

- This recommendation is based on the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) program in Eugene, Oregon. CAHOOTS is a mobile crisis intervention team that responds to "non-criminal crises, including homelessness, intoxication, disorientation, substance abuse and mental illness problems, and dispute resolution." The annual operating budget for the CAHOOTS program **supporting 40 staff members, who are available 24/7 in some areas, is \$1.5 million dollars. Staff members earn \$18/hr, plus benefits**, which is significantly less than the cost of hiring additional police officers.

Budget Director Yaccirino said, "Police officers spend an average of 1 hour and 43 minutes per mental health observation call. There were 8,141 calls in 2019 meaning officers used 13,975 hours at these calls or the equivalent of at least 7 police officers."

Building this program would be a better investment for the city of Milwaukee and save the city money. Now is the time to be a better stewards of our taxpayer dollars. Be bold with your amendments and help put an end to violence that causes injury, abuse, damage and the destruction in our communities.

As individuals, organizations, and community members committed to investing in proven strategies to increase the health and wellbeing of our entire community, we strongly support the adoption of this as a budget amendment.

Sincerely,

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