

Testimony on Mental Health Crisis Response Silver Spring Justice Coalition

I am a therapist and I lead the Silver Spring Justice Coalition's advocacy on mental health crisis response.

We appreciate that the county will soon have three crisis units and maybe three more next year. However, an incremental approach is not commensurate with the urgent need to prevent harm by police against mentally ill residents, and to provide the best standard of care to everyone experiencing a mental health crisis.

Under the proposed level of staffing, mentally ill residents will still be at risk of police harassment and violence when they call for help. Not until the county can assure all residents – especially all Black and Brown and immigrant residents - that they will be safe from harm in a mental health crisis, will this council have fulfilled its responsibility.

As long as police fill the gap in staffing mobile crisis teams, Black, Brown and immigrant residents will not trust that they can call for help, even in dire circumstances.

The Silver Spring Justice Coalition urges you to re-allocate funds from MCPD to fully fund timely mental health crisis teams, 24/7, throughout the county; invest in a CAHOOTS model that is attuned to the demographics of our county; hire many more licensed mental health staff that are bilingual and steeped in cultural humility and knowledge; bring on a corps of bilingual peer support specialists and outreach workers; establish a dedicated mental health crisis hotline staffed by bilingual mental health professionals; invest in a multilingual public education program; and develop a crisis response advisory group comprised of impacted individuals. Finally, the mobile crisis teams should be thoroughly assessed and all data made available to the public.

When police are relieved of mental health duties, lives are saved and costs for policing are significantly reduced. We urge you to commit, now, to put the safety of all residents front and center, and fully fund all aspects of mental health crisis response in the upcoming budget.

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<https://www.kqed.org/news/11840071/mental-health-and-racial-justice-why-advocates-want-to-get-police-out-of-crisis-responses>

<https://denverite.com/2021/02/02/in-the-first-six-months-of-health-care-professionals-replacing-police-officers-no-one-they-encountered-was-arrested/>