



Thank you for having me today. My name is Alex Domingos, Advocacy and Policy Strategist for the ACLU of Pennsylvania. I'm here speaking on behalf of our members, donors and supporters that reside here in Allentown. We are proud to support this important ballot initiative and uplift the will of Allentown residents in increasing public safety via a crisis response pilot program.

Diverse jurisdictions across the country have implemented alternative crisis response programs similar to the one being proposed here. In addition to the Eugene, Oregon CAHOOTS program that you all received a detailed presentation about in the past couple of years: Dayton, Ohio, Durham North Carolina, St. Petersburg Florida, Olympia Washington, Austin Texas, Baltimore Maryland and other cities have seen successes with this model, with their units responding to thousands of calls, providing clinical support and diverting individuals from the criminal legal system.

According to a Right to Know request filed by the ACLU-PA, 89,794 911 calls were made from Allentown last year. The 6th most frequent call was "Check on Welfare" and the 19th most frequent call was "Psych Emergency". Even diverting a fraction of calls like these to trained mental health professionals could reduce police use of force, violence against people with disabilities, de-escalate situations and prevent unnecessary arrests and involvement in the criminal legal system.

In order for such a program to be successful, it requires the support and buy-in of all stakeholders. We all have a role to play to ensure safe responses to those who are experiencing a crisis, making sure that they are treated with dignity and that their well-being is a priority. Never should the police be the go-to when addressing various social issues, especially those that are a public health issue, when there are more qualified health professionals that could address the calls and be more effective. And, we understand that there has to be checks and balances to ensure success. And, that is why data collection has been written into the proposal. It is imperative that accurate and comprehensive data be kept on such a program to measure outcomes. 911 dispatchers already make crucial decisions every day about how to respond to emergencies and should be empowered through adequate technology and training to make decisions about when to send crisis response teams versus armed police officers. It is also imperative that investments and partnerships be made to facilitate back end services such as walk-in crisis centers and acute inpatient treatment.

I would like to emphasize that this measure has no effect on police budgets, programming, staffing or initiatives. I have heard all of you speak about the importance of public safety. We have also heard the community echo that belief. This program is simply adding another tool to Allentown's public safety toolkit to increase effectiveness and promote the health and safety of community members. In places across the country, we've seen measures like this work and enhance public safety ;and, we do not want to be left behind in doing what's best for the

everyday people and the people you all serve. We sincerely hope for the support of council in implementing this program here.

Thank you,
Alex Domingos
Advocacy & Policy Strategist, ACLU of Pennsylvania