



**TESTIMONY OF
THE COALITION FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
Before the New York City Council
Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism,
Substance Abuse and Disability Services
Jointly with the
Committee on Public Safety**

**Honorable Andrew Cohen, Chair, Committee on Mental Health
Honorable Vanessa Gibson, Chair, Committee on Public Safety**

NYPD's Responses to Persons in Mental Health Crisis

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Thank you, Councilmembers Andrew Cohen and Vanessa Gibson, for convening today's hearing on NYPD's Responses to Persons in Mental Health Crisis.

The Coalition for Behavioral Health, Inc. (The Coalition) is the umbrella advocacy and training organization of New York's behavioral health community, representing over 140 non-profit community-based agencies that serve more than 450,000 consumers and employ well over 35,000 workers. Our members serve the entire continuum of behavioral health care in every neighborhood of New York City, and communities across Long Island, Westchester, Rockland and Orange counties. Coalition members provide access to the range of outpatient mental health and substance use services, supportive housing, crisis intervention, peer support services, employment readiness, Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS), Club Houses, education and nutritional services, as well as many other supports that promote recovery. The

Coalition also trains over 4000 human services providers annually on cutting edge and proven clinical and best business practices through generous support from the New York City Council, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), New York State Office of Mental Health OMH), and in conjunction with foundations and leaders from the behavioral health sector.

We are grateful for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on NYPD's Responses to Persons in Mental Health Crisis. We deeply regret instances where the response to persons in mental health crisis have had unfortunate outcomes. But we are encouraged by the participation and cooperation of law enforcement and the strategies that came out of the Mayor's Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System.

The Coalition finds it gratifying to know that despite the current reactionary milieu that the City of New York, Mayor Bill deBlasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray, and the New York City Council value the lives of vulnerable New Yorkers with mental illness and addiction disorders. In a time of uncertainty, the City has continued to shift the focus of mental health services from stigmatization and prosecution to one in accord with a scientific and humane interpretation of mental illness and addiction disorders as illnesses that respond to proper and respectful treatment. And further, that employing a public health perspective, including prevention, assessment of risk and providing treatment to meet the need, is applicable.

The Coalition would like to commend the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on its implementation of ThriveNYC. We were very pleased to learn of the progress made on interventions that prevent or stabilize individuals at risk for or in crisis, including 4,900 NYPD officers and staff who have been trained in crisis intervention; and the successful launch of Well NYC and the significant numbers of New Yorkers who were enabled to access confidential crisis counseling, referrals to services, mobile crisis services, and peer support services

There are several initiatives we would like to single out for contributing appropriate de-escalation techniques for individuals at risk or experiencing a mental health crisis. We believe all of them significantly contribute to election of safe alternatives to forceful means, and decrease unnecessary hospitalization and incarcerations. Yet, these programs are often underfunded or scant. We are grateful for the City's investment, but urge the City to replicate successful innovative programs and turn promising pilot programs into permanent programs to meet long standing needs that have gone unmet for far too long.

Mental Health First Aid Training- The City was wise to prioritize Mental Health First Aid Training for uniformed services. They are the “authority figure” that people alert when they are concerned about a person’s seemingly abnormal behaviors. The training also makes officers more aware of individuals who may be in distress. Nationally, Mental Health First Aid has proven successful and locally, we have received very positive feedback from people who attended the training. Our members have suggested, however, that officers would benefit from some on-site time in our community mental health clinics.

Police Crisis Intervention Team Program and Training (CIT)- A public health approach to mental illness and addiction is predicated on client centrality. CIT helps officers distinguish people in mental health crisis from aggressive or criminal violence and teaches techniques for engaging people in respectful and non-stigmatizing ways.

The Coalition also supports Mobile Crisis Teams which have proven effective at reaching people in need who can often deescalate and event and prevent crisis; and Community Health Co-Responder Teams, comprised of officers and clinicians who respond to immediate needs quickly. Officers profit from the skills of clinicians who can discern what may be driving a chaotic situation, and help identify alternative placements to hospitals or incarceration that would be most beneficial for the individual. We urge the City to expand these teams in number and locations.

The Coalition is also very interested in following the development of the two new Drop-off Diversion Centers which will provide short term stabilizing services as an alternative to arrest or hospitalization for people who are experiencing a crisis but do not pose a risk to public safety. We congratulate the City for investing in cutting edge, innovative and humane alternatives. We have every confidence the City will continue to work closely with the mental health and addiction communities to inform the direction, success and growth of this model. The concept accords with our values and respect for our neighbors who experience a mental health crisis who can go to a clinically supportive environment and avoid unnecessary hospitalization or incarceration.

We are very pleased to count as our members the agencies developing the model, Project Renewal and Samaritan Daytop Village.

CONCLUSION

The Coalition for Behavioral Health looks forward to working with the City Council and all of the partner agencies and organizations to ensure that people experiencing mental health crisis receive appropriate stabilization and treatment in the most appropriate and least restricting

settings when possible. We thank the City Council for offering the opportunity to express our thanks and our recommendations.

Respectfully Submitted,

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