

Basic background principles regarding response to emergencies  
(draft pulled from our brief reactions to testimony in committee)

1. Mental health is a fully integral component of health care, and is not a component of the criminal justice system. Emergency services responses do sometimes include public safety service needs, but public safety responses should not be considered the overarching framework for such responses.

2. The state's mental health care services are wholly inadequate to promote health and this represents the root cause of many emergent situations. There is a pressing need for more robust community services to support mental health needs.

3. There is a need for a more cohesive framework for emergency responses to mental health crises. That framework needs to encompass equitable access to crisis response on a statewide basis, and need to be developed to incorporate improved mechanisms of triage for the appropriate emergency services, including the role of 911 system. It needs to incorporate appropriate utilization of peer support services. It should be developed through the Dept of MH in close coordination with persons with lived experience of psychiatric disabilities, all branches of law enforcement, the designated agency system, and the hospital system. The appropriate balance of funding sources also needs evaluation. This cannot be developed in the timeframe for the current budget but needs ongoing work which needs to be moving forward.

5. There is an immediate need to enhance the ability to provide safe, appropriate crisis responses that reduce involvement of law enforcement when those supports are not necessary for public safety, and that ensure strong coordination when those supports are necessary. Law enforcement uses a significant amount of its resources on responding to mental health crises that draw them away from core duties, and they are not best-equipped or trained for that level of response. The framework for developing the immediate enhancement for responses should be driven by identification of appropriate mental health services, reflected through the resources and oversight headed by the Department of Mental Health.

6. For fy 21 \$525,000 is appropriated to the Dept of MH for the purpose of working with the Dept of Public Safety and stakeholders to add front line staff targeting the most immediate needs for emergency services for MH crises.

The use of the funds shall incorporate these elements:

-- specifics for immediate parameters for these funds and inclusion of stakeholders, consistent with long term goals, to be discussed by committee

7. Report back (soon, on how immediate plan is moving forward; plus later, on development of re-envisioned system?)