

MEMORANDUM

TO: House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Emily Hawes, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health

DATE: February 13, 2026

RE: Written Testimony on FY27 Budget Request – Team Two

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) works to enhance diversion efforts, support public safety, and ensure Vermonters in mental health crisis receive appropriate care. As the crisis system evolves, DMH has expanded its role by providing coordinated training, and will continue to expand trainings. This training unites law enforcement, EMS, crisis clinicians, peer supports, and community providers to deliver a unified response.

DMH recognizes the significant contributions of Team Two, which has fostered strong partnerships between public safety and the mental health community. These relationships remain essential. As the crisis system has expanded with 988, Mobile Crisis Teams, and Mental Health Urgent Cares, the State's training needs have grown. DMH is building on this foundation by developing a statewide training network with crisis providers that aligns with current laws, best practices, and available resources.

DMH has established a dedicated team to develop and coordinate the crisis system. This team supports implementation, promotes cross-system collaboration, and provides training and technical assistance to law enforcement and first responders statewide. They focus on strengthening regional connections, particularly among leaders in public safety and mental health agencies. This new role enables DMH to offer ongoing, comprehensive training and to enhance relationships between public safety and crisis workers in alignment with existing services.

Effective crisis response now requires all responders to know when and how to divert individuals from emergency departments and the criminal justice system toward community-based care. DMH's training fosters this shared understanding, giving first responders clear options for connecting people to appropriate services. This approach reduces unnecessary hospital visits and law enforcement involvement, resulting in better outcomes for individuals in crisis.

The Department now offers more interactive trainings focused on real-life situations, such as scenario-based learning. These trainings build confidence in diversion options, enhance de-escalation skills, and strengthen collaboration between public safety and crisis workers. Training areas include:

- Current laws, guidelines, and crisis response standards



- The Vermont Crisis Continuum of Care (including 988, Mobile Crisis Teams, and Mental Health Urgent Cares)
- De-escalation and trauma-informed approaches
- Responding to individuals experiencing psychosis
- Understanding trauma and the role of peer support

The Department appreciates Team Two's contributions and looks forward to continued collaboration with and between law enforcement, EMS, crisis clinicians, community providers, peers, and others responding to or impacted by crises.

