



March 16, 2021

The Honorable Sydney Kamlager
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4062
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 118 (Kamlager) Emergency services: community response: grant program – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Kamlager,

On behalf of the California State Association of Psychiatrists, I write in support of your AB 118, which would establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (CRISES) Act pilot program, which will scale up community-based alternatives to police.

In many cities across the State, community organizations are successfully responding to emergency situations. Despite the positive impact and cost savings of community-oriented responses to emergencies, California has done little to support and scale these efforts. Instead, law enforcement officers respond to emergencies that would be better suited to peer support experts, mental health providers, or crisis counselors trained in de-escalating and resolving crises. These types of services need to be part of the web of emergency response networks.

The San Francisco Police Department estimates that up to 80% of calls for service in the City are for people in mental health crises and that police officers bring close to 4,000 people per year to psychiatric facilities. San Francisco Mayor London Breed released a plan on June 11, 2020 to reform the San Francisco Police Department by replacing sworn officers responding to non-criminal activities with trained and non-armed professionals.

While law enforcement officers may be well-intentioned, police presence can exacerbate a situation involving a person or people in crisis. There are significant, unnecessary costs associated with officers as first-responders for mental health crises and for instances of intimate partner violence, among other situations that arise in our communities.

In worst-case scenarios, officers use force in response to a person in crisis, resulting in unnecessary and unjust deaths. Policing has put too many people unnecessarily in danger who only need help. For young Black men, police violence is a leading cause of death. Also, police kill people with mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, 16 times more often than people without mental health issues.

AB 118 establishes the CRISES Act pilot grant program, promoting community-based responses to local emergency situations, including, but not limited to:

- Public Health Crisis

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- People Experiencing Homelessness
- Mental Health Crisis
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Community Violence
- Substance Use
- Natural Disasters

The pilot program will provide a minimum of \$250,000 per organization per year for the life of the grant program. The pilot aims to create and strengthen alternatives to law enforcement in response to crisis situations not related to or that do not require a Fire Department or Emergency Medical Service (EMS) response in communities where there is a history and pattern of racial profiling, law enforcement violence, gaps in law enforcement service or where vulnerable populations live.

For all these reasons, the California State Association of Psychiatrists is pleased to support AB 118. Thank you for your authorship of this measure.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Yoder
Legislative Advocate

CC: Chair and Members, Assembly Committee on Emergency Management