April 26, 2022

Chair Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C.

Ranking Member Kay Granger
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

Thank you for your leadership and work to secure funding for crisis response teams in fiscal year 2022. As you work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we write to request an increase in funding to encourage the creation and expansion of alternative crisis response teams to $100 million.

In the explanatory statement for the FY 2022 Appropriations Omnibus, Congress included language supporting $10 million for emergency response teams that divert mental health crisis calls from law enforcement to behavioral health teams. Encouraging the use of behavioral health professionals to respond to mental health crisis situations improves the quality of crisis response and strengthens public safety by providing long term solutions to mental health and substance use issues. That is why we strongly encourage higher funding levels.

These initiatives have a demonstrated track record of not only providing more appropriate care to meet the needs of communities, but also reducing unnecessary interactions between police and community members. The overwhelming majority of 911 calls involve mental health and substance use incidents, neighbor disputes, nuisance complaints, and requests for wellness checks that require appropriately trained, unarmed behavioral health professionals. Both the police and policing reform advocates often assert that specialized service providers—such as social workers, paramedics, and peer support counselors—are better equipped to handle such situations than armed officers.

For some local governments, however, establishing and growing crisis response teams is cost prohibitive given the resources it takes to cover training, personnel, and equipment. Additional federal funding could go a long way in offsetting costs and spurring growth of these programs across the country. Crisis response teams are important components of building up comprehensive crisis care infrastructure as outlined by SAMHSA’s National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care, which emphasizes a no-wrong-door integrated crisis system that directs people to care wherever they are introduced to the system.
It is critical that we make investments in public safety programs that center mental health care and work to resolve the underlying conditions of so many emergency calls—homelessness, substance use, and other chronic health issues. Existing 911 response limited to police, fire, or EMT services have been overwhelmed and simply do not meet the needs of the communities they serve. A focus on a holistic public safety approach centered on the needs of communities is long overdue.

We urge you to include $100 million in funding for crisis response teams in the FY 2023 appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
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Ayanna Pressley
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Jamie Raskin
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress