

911 Diversion to Unarmed Personnel Act **Rep. Adam Smith**

911 receives more than 240 million calls every year. The overwhelming majority of these calls involve nonviolent, non-criminal incidents such as neighbor disputes, nuisance complaints, truancy, reports of “suspicious” activity, requests for wellness checks, and mental health crises. 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. The “send the police to everything” approach that prevails in much of our country often places armed law enforcement officers in situations they are neither equipped nor trained to handle and leads to encounters between police and civilians that turn violent and, in many cases, deadly.

The 911 Diversion to Unarmed Personnel Act would provide funding for unarmed 911 response programs that divert nonviolent 911 calls toward specialized service providers and away from traditional law enforcement. Such funding may be used to hire and train service professionals and 911 dispatchers, modify existing 911 call systems, and obtain equipment and technological capabilities. This will enhance public safety, deliver better outcomes for community members, produce cost savings, and reduce strain on the relationship between police officers and the people they are sworn to serve. The time has come to institute a holistic, equitable approach to public safety that centers on connecting individuals to resources and services they need.

The 911 Diversion to Unarmed Personnel Act would:

- ❖ Establish a grant program for state, local, and tribal governments to develop and institute 911 diversion programs that would route calls regarding nonviolent, non-criminal incidents towards unarmed personnel and away from law enforcement.
- ❖ Provide funding for training, operational costs (e.g., equipment, technology), salary, and benefits.
- ❖ Require that such programs are managed independently from and are not subject to oversight from state or local law enforcement agencies.
- ❖ Require that grant recipients update 911 response systems to enable triage between nonviolent, non-criminal calls and those that warrant a response from law enforcement
- ❖ Ensure that individuals who are the subject of calls to 911 and who are experiencing addiction, homelessness, or mental health crises are met with professional service providers capable of providing screening, assessment, de-escalation, and transportation to immediately necessary treatment.
- ❖ Promote coordination between 911 diversion programs and health and social services.

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