



CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

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July 23, 2024

Honorable Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, Orange County
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report, "Law Enforcement's Response to Mental Health Calls for Service"

Dear Honorable Judge Hernandez:

In accordance with Penal Code 933.05 (a) & (b), the City of Newport Beach responds as follows in regard to "Findings" F1, F2, F3, F4 and F5 as detailed in the 2023-2024 Orange County Grand Jury report, "Law Enforcement's Response to Mental Health Calls for Service."

FINDING

F1. Mental health training for law enforcement officers in Orange County exceeds the State's requirements, resulting in law enforcement applying these skills to better evaluate and handle mental health calls for service.

RESPONSE

The City of Newport Beach agrees with this finding as the Police Department utilizes formal and informal mental health training. Officers receive formal mental health training while attending the police academy, and academy recruits receive 15 hours of training in Learning Domain #37, People with Disabilities. Supervisors and Field Training Officers are required to attend a Crisis Intervention and Behavioral Health Training course. Mental health emergencies are taught in the Newport Beach Police Department's First Aid Training curriculum so officers may identify those with potential mental illnesses in the field. The Newport Beach Police Department also provides mental health and de-escalation training as part of its annual Use of Force Perishable Skills Training. Be Well OC (a contracted Mobile Response Team) regularly attends patrol briefings to conduct trainings with patrol officers on the services it offers to the community. Some of the topics covered are: Mental Health and Behavioral Crisis, Suicidal Ideations, and Homelessness. The Homeless Liaison Officer and several members of the Peninsula Enforcement Team have attended a Homeless Liaison Officer training course where they learned about mental health care systems and how they can help unhoused individuals.

The Newport Beach Police Department has a Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT) comprised of nine negotiators and two sergeants. While this is an ancillary assignment, CNT members attend a 40-hour basic negotiations course and an advanced negotiations course, which focuses in part on de-escalation techniques and how to negotiate with individuals experiencing mental illness. CNT members respond not only during critical incidents as part of their Crisis Response Unit (SWAT and CNT) but also regularly respond to calls for service involving suicidal subjects and subjects experiencing mental health crises.

FINDING

F2. Law enforcement agencies in Orange County have developed unique ways to deal with mental health calls in their communities based on their particular needs and budgets, enabling law enforcement to better serve their communities.

RESPONSE

The City of Newport Beach agrees with this finding as it budgets a Homeless Services Manager and several mental health contracts. The City recently contracted with PATH (People Assisting the Homeless). PATH personnel are non-sworn caseworkers who work with the Police Department's Homeless Liaison Officer and can assist our unhoused population with numerous resources, including mental health resources. PATH is able to help individuals get to doctor appointments and get mental health prescriptions and hospital intakes. They can utilize Care Coordination to help individuals connect to medical and mental health resources. The City also contracted with Be Well OC to assist with mental health services, resources, and calls for service. Be Well OC can do psychiatric referrals, crisis stabilization unit referrals, sobering placement, and long-term case management. Be Well OC staff members regularly attend patrol briefings to conduct training with patrol officers on the mental health services it offers the community. PATH and Be Well OC work in collaboration with the Homeless Liaison Officer and Homeless Services Manager to assist unhoused individuals who are struggling with mental illness. Mental illness can often be a barrier to shelter and permanent housing.

FINDING

F3. Law enforcement collaboration with County PERT clinicians and Be Well mobile response units has been an effective tool when responding to mental health calls for service.

RESPONSE

The City of Newport Beach agrees with this finding as the Police Department utilizes a County of Orange PERT (Psychiatric Emergency and Response Team) clinician who rides with Newport Beach Police Department patrol officers twice weekly. PERT is an effective tool because it can respond quickly to any mental health calls for service. Riding in the car alongside an officer allows PERT to respond quicker and faster than the County's Crisis Assessment Team (CAT). The CAT Team is utilized on a callout basis and can sometimes be delayed in its response. Be Well representatives can help both the housed and unhoused populations in Newport Beach with mental health services. They respond to calls for service, make referrals to crisis stabilization units, and help individuals get psychiatric help and medications. Be Well can also help with long-term case management and mental health treatment. Persons experiencing mental illness may also respond more positively to non-law enforcement personnel. PERT and Be Well are additional de-escalation tools for police officers.

FINDING

F4. People with mental illness respond more positively to "soft uniformed" police personnel, which can be effective in de-escalating situations.

RESPONSE

The City of Newport Beach agrees with this finding as the Police Department's Homeless Liaison Officer and Peninsula Enforcement Team officers wear a soft uniform with a polo shirt, bicycle pants, and tennis shoes. The Homeless Liaison Officer drives an all-black, unmarked police vehicle that can be perceived as less intimidating than a marked police vehicle. The CNT members wear a soft uniform, including a polo shirt and cargo style pants, which provide a less threatening appearance and make it easier to establish rapport with individuals in crisis. Be Well and PATH both wear soft uniforms, including a polo shirt or t-shirt with their respective logos. Be Well staff members drive a marked blue van throughout the city that is easily identifiable. PATH uses various vehicles with the PATH logo on the side. People with mental illness will often prefer to speak with a non-sworn/civilian individual.

FINDING

F5. Providing follow-up case management is not only necessary but critical for the wellbeing of people experiencing mental health issues.

RESPONSE

The City of Newport Beach agrees with this finding as the Police Department's Homeless Liaison Officer works closely with Be Well and PATH to focus on long-term mental health case management for unhoused individuals. Be Well is a critical component of case management for the Newport Beach Police Department. Be Well can help families of loved ones with mental illness get connected to the proper treatment and support resources. It also makes referrals to Adult Protective Services, eviction prevention, and court-case navigation. Long-term case management is an essential factor in trying to help those individuals with mental illness from becoming homeless. Case management can also help those unhoused individuals with mental illness, who may be service resistant, become receptive to shelter and housing options.

Should you or any members of the Grand Jury have questions about our response, please contact Police Chief Joe Cartwright at jcartwright@nbpd.org or 949-644-3701.

Sincerely,



Mayor Will O'Neill
City of Newport Beach