

Alternatives to Calling Police and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training

Advocating for the Safety of People with Disabilities

Speak Up Speak Out Curtis Harris and Laura Furlong November 16, 2021

Learning Objectives

Today's Agenda

- What is Community Emergency Services and Support Act (CESSA)
- What it's like to support crisis support without the police involved
- Why police officers need improved training in CIT
- What strategies were helpful in this advocacy journey

What is CESSA?

Community Emergency Services and Supports Act

- Signed into law August 25, 2021
- Addresses the health needs of people who are non violent and who are not violating the law by sending support instead of police
- Address tragedies like Stephon Watts
- Requires emergency response operators to refer calls for mental health supports to a service that dispatches mental health professionals instead of police
- Requires calls referred to DHS-Division of Mental Health-Rollout 2022

How will CESSA support people?

What self-advocates can expect

- New approach to emergency response
- Lessen unnecessary lockups and reduce police violence
- Recognize that black and brown disabled people make up more than half of those killed by police
- Recognize that only 3-5% of violent acts are attributed to people living with mental illness making police response very frequently unnecessary
- First responders will be trained and supported with Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)
- Modeled after the CAHOOTS model that operates in Eugene, Oregon that dispatches teams of support including nurses, EMT's and crisis worker with experience in mental health

What brought about the need for CESSA?

The Problems in the Current System for Mental Health Emergencies

- 10% of 911 calls request help with mental or behavioral health emergency
- Illinois lacks a coordinated health care response service so 911 can only dispatch law enforcement
- Law enforcement practices that focus on “command and control” of a location makes these situations worse
- Law enforcement skills are rarely needed as people with mental health issues are much less likely to be violent than others
- Law enforcement is compelled to hospitalize or jail people with mental health needs but in reality 90% of people do not need such an invasive and costly response
- Lack of Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for first responders

What will CESSA do in our communities?

Here's what changes you may see.....

- Create a 911 response option apart from law enforcement for mental and behavioral health emergencies wherever ambulance services exist
- Requires responders to use appropriate de-escalation techniques and then connect callers to existing care providers or available community supports
- Saves state and local dollars by supporting people in the community rather than in emergency rooms and jails
- Each Emergency Medical System (EMS) to design regionally appropriate systems
- Establish partnerships with law enforcement and mental health resource which will reduce arrests of those who have mental illnesses or disabilities
- Connects to the database and webpage with a comprehensive collection of mental health resources specifically geared toward first responders
- Strengthening Illinois' crisis mental health infrastructure ahead of next year's national roll out of 988 (Suicide Prevention)

What strategies were learned on the journey?

Inspirations and Skills to Reaching this Advocacy Milestone

- Have passion for the issue
- Gain as much knowledge on the issue and learn what obstacles might lead to resolution
- Build an “army” that understands your issue and perspective
- Use your connections
- Don’t take “No” for an answer
- Put yourself in front of influencers
- Share the issues with the public
- Know that there may be major setbacks and that change takes time.....but don’t stop

Resources

To Learn More

- <https://www.accessliving.org/defending-our-rights/racial-justice/community-emergency-services-and-support-act-cessa/>
- <https://www.nprillinois.org/statehouse/2021-06-02/illinois-begins-to-build-mental-health-emergency-response-system>
- <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/16/2020-16908/implementation-of-the-national-suicide-hotline-improvement-act-of-2018>
- <https://www.thekennedyforum.org/press-releases/countdown-states-have-one-year-to-facilitate-988-the-nations-first-mental-health-crisis-line/>
- <https://www.citinternational.org/>