



WASHTENAW COUNTY OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF



JERRY L. CLAYTON
SHERIFF

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MARK A. PTASZEK
UNDERSHERIFF

April 20, 2021

The Honorable Cory Booker, Chair
U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism

The Honorable Tom Cotton, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism

Dear Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Cotton, and Subcommittee Members,

I urge this Subcommittee to support and fund additional community-based services for people with mental health and substance use challenges. Too often, across this country people in need of treatment end up in our jails. This is not where they belong. Mental health and addiction issues should not be part of the criminal legal system. Therefore, whenever possible we should make efforts to find ways to provide community-based care without ever connecting with law enforcement. This is consistent with our philosophical and operational beliefs around Deflection, Diversion, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice, where we particularly focus on keeping those with mental health and substance abuse disorders out of the criminal legal system. When we engage in discussions about when and how police should respond the highest priority should always be the sanctity of all human life.

We are supportive of, whenever possible without endangering the public or law enforcement officers, that people in crisis be responded to by funded, trained, culturally competent mental health and social work professionals. This should not be an issue of defunding the police. The focus should be on how to provide the best possible service and care to vulnerable people. I strongly advocate for and support funding for a continuum of response options. During situations involving individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis that has no direct nexus to criminal activity or behaviors that put others in harm's way, Emergency Response Centers should have the capacity to send alternative responders that do not involve law enforcement.

Too often, however, calls for service involve ambiguous or multi-layered situations. In those cases, there should be some sort of co-response. Again, we urge support for those programs. Realistically, there still may be many situations where law enforcement will be the proper and safest initial response to a situation which later turns out to involve a mental health/ substance abuse issue where trained treatment responders should be called in. We therefore urge you to support and fund enhanced training for law enforcement to recognize and respond appropriately and safely in situations where they are first on scene. We urge increased support for mental health and substance abuse treatment beds as well as trained personnel, and alternate and innovative programs to better serve our communities. We can and should do better in how we respond and care for people in need of treatment not incarceration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Clayton".

Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton