

**Recommendation 64B: The City of Madison should explore through whatever mechanisms it deems appropriate (be it in partnership with the County, exploration of grants, or other mechanisms) to create a dedicated mental health first responder unit, outside of MPD, modeled off the CAHOOTS program in Eugene and Springfield, Oregon, to respond to known mental health crisis.**

For a person in a mental health crisis, dispatching police officers may not provide the most optimal response. Moreover, officers often view mental health calls as fraught, since police are not specialized mental health care workers and the subjects may act unpredictably.

In Eugene and Springfield, OR, the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On the Streets) program provides an alternative to police response appropriate for a broad range of non-criminal crises, including mental health problems, suicide prevention calls, homelessness, intoxication, disorientation, substance abuse, and dispute resolution. This 24/7 mobile crisis intervention service is wired into the 911 system and responds to most calls without police. Each team consists of a medic (either a nurse or an EMT) and a crisis worker (who has at least several years' experience in the mental health field). The response vehicles are vans, suitable for transportation of subjects.

Implementation of a program like CAHOOTS would provide a more appropriate professional response in many cases than dispatch of an MPD officer. The responders in this program have more expertise in dealing with people with mental health issues, allowing more skilled handling and better quality of care while reducing the risk of escalation. This approach also helps avoid criminalization of mental health crises. Moreover, the cost is far less than that of dispatching sworn law enforcement officers. An officer could always be dispatched if, upon triage, the mental health responders concluded that protective custody was needed (such that officers would only be needed for a fraction of the current calls of this sort).

The current annual operating budget for CAHOOTS in Eugene and Springfield is \$1.6 million, with about \$800,000 each coming from Eugene and Lane County. CAHOOTS handles about 17% of Eugene police calls, or about 23,000 calls for service annually in Eugene alone, at a fraction of the cost of police response (for comparison, the Eugene Police Department has a \$58 million annual budget).

In Eugene and Springfield, the CAHOOTS program is considered a resounding success and its usage continues to expand. Moreover, the program has found appeal across the political spectrum—with progressives lauding it as providing a more compassionate, humane means of response and conservatives lauding the cost savings.

Multiple additional cities are now taking initial steps to implement such a service, including Oakland, CA, Olympia, WA, Portland, OR, Denver, CO, New York, NY, Indianapolis, IN, and Roseburg, OR. These cities are obtaining strategic guidance and training from CAHOOTS to replicate the success of the program in their own communities.

A similar program—a mental health ambulance staffed by two mental health nurses and a paramedic—has been implemented in Stockholm, Sweden, starting in 2015. According to Fredrik Bengtsson, head of Mental Health Emergency Services at Sabbatsberg Hospital, "It has been considered a huge success by police, nurses, healthcare officials, as well as by the patients."

MPD is open to such a program in Madison. The concept is recognized as having real merit, potentially removing burden from MPD. An OIR survey of MPD officers revealed that officers feel they are currently

frequently being dispatched to calls where law enforcement officers are not needed and can't provide the most suitable response (driving up MPD staffing requirements at considerable expense).