

Recommendation xx: The Mental Health Team should develop guidelines or protocols for periodically reviewing mental health safety bulletins and associated alerts to assess whether they should be amended or purged from the system. [OIR 58]

Discussion: MPD generates one-page mental health safety bulletins, which appear on an officer's in-car computer when they run the subject's name in the system. An alert may also be placed in the system used by the 911 Center, so that dispatchers may notify officers of mental health concerns associated with an address they're responding to. The mental health safety bulletins capture vital information about people who have had prior interactions with police, and include trauma history, mental health diagnosis, suicide attempts, history of worrisome interactions with police, and potential hooks, triggers, and guidance for negotiations. When Mental Health Officers create these bulletins, they enter an alert into the Department's records management system, and also upload the document into the associated file. The alerts require an expiration date, and OIR noted that this is routinely set at one year, but that the document itself remains in the system indefinitely.

OIR noted that the bulletins are a valuable tool, but need to be regularly reviewed and either amended or purged from the system. A person in crisis now may not be in the same condition months or a year from now, and someone currently in recovery would not want or need to be treated as though they were in crisis. Outdated mental health concerns conveyed in a bulletin can lead to officers taking actions that are no longer appropriate, and can cause unnecessary stigmatization of individuals. OIR further noted that Mental Health Officers were aware of concerns about the duration of the notifications, but that there were no set guidelines to address these issues.

MPD expressed agreement with the crux of this recommendation but noted that the bulletins are considered public records under Wisconsin law and thus cannot be purged until a set number of years has elapsed, pursuant to the City's records retention schedule. MPD further stated that the expiration date for alerts is generally set at one to five years, that after an alert expires "the actual document remains in existence, but is not stored in a manner that line officers will see it or be alerted to its existence," and that the Mental Health Team would review the process to ensure that the alert expirations are set appropriately. In its November 2018 updated response, MPD stated: "The Mental Health Unit has completed migrating these documents to an internal database that makes managing and updating information much easier. In addition, the unit is in the process of reviewing all existing bulletins to ensure they are updated and that those that are not current are stored in an area not readily available to field officers. This balances our legal requirement to retain these documents as public records with the privacy interests of those noted in the bulletins. Moving forward the process will include automatic periodic reviews of bulletins and alerts." The Committee agrees that MPD should periodically review and amend these documents, and minimize availability of outdated information. It appreciates that MPD is enacting changes in protocols to address this issue.