

June \*\*\*, 2024

To the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors:

The Sacramento County Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) writes today to inform you of the important public health challenges faced by the county's transition to separate 911 and 988 hotline numbers and mitigation of police response to mental health emergencies in the absence of crimes in progress. We request your redoubled support of the Community Wellness Response Teams (CWRTs) working faithfully to address individuals in mental health crises.

In September 2022, California AB 988 (The Miles Hall Lifeline Act) was signed into law, aiming to establish and expand services for Californians experiencing a behavioral health crisis, implementing the 988 mental health lifeline and coordination with 911 services.\*\*\* Sacramento County was on the leading edge of this transition, with the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors already having voted to approve a 24/7 behavioral health crisis response program in June 2021.\*\*\* CWRT became operational 24/7 in March 2024, as a partnership between Sacramento County Behavioral Health Services, WellSpace Health and Bay Area Community Services.\*\*\* This has been a very successful program thus far, and well-received by the public.

- WellSpace Health 988 provides 24/7 phone, chat, and text coverage throughout the state and nationwide, and provides warm transfers as needed to CWRT for callers within Sacramento County in need of an in-person response for any mental health crisis.\*\*\*
- Behavioral Health Link (BHL) software captures vital information for CWRT including accurate GPS location of callers, and provides accurate and real-time availability and location of the Response Team.\*\*\*
- CWRT operates 11 teams (as of May 2025) and an average time to scene arrival of approximately one hour, with a 90% success rate of not needing to place the individual suffering from a mental health emergency on a 5150 hold, ameliorating the individual's experience and decreasing the burden on Sacramento County's Emergency Medical system and hospitals.\*\*\*

However, recent events transitioning the role of police officer involvement in response to mental health emergencies have triggered a multitude of consequences and placed additional burden on CWRTs.

- The Ninth Circuit court decision in Scott v. Smith (July 2024) clarified that police officers use of deadly bodyweight force in response to mental health emergency calls not involving a crime can compromise said officers qualified immunity.\*\*\*
- In February 2025, contrary to state and federal policing best practices, Sacramento County Sheriff Jim Cooper announced his department would no longer respond to mental health calls when a crime is not suspected.\*\*\*
- 988 calls in Sacramento County redirected to CWRT increased 32% from February to March 2025 alone, indicating residents' further reliance on 988 and CWRT for mental health emergencies.\*\*\*
- There has been a significant decrease in the use of Sacramento County Law Enforcement's Co-response Crisis Intervention Team (CCIT), previously the avenue for responding to emergency calls via 911 dispatch for individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis.\*\*\*

Significant unanticipated consequences have resulted from this shift of responsibility. When an individual calls 988 for support, CWRT cannot respond in-person if the individual reports having a weapon with them. In the case of concern for psychiatric illnesses causing grave disability, CWRT has limited abilities to restrain individuals to provide them with assistance or emergent transport when they are suffering from a psychotic episode. The Behavioral Health team duo that makes up the CWRT doesn't have the ability to put hands on individuals and detain or transport those too agitated or ill to consent to go to a mental health urgent care center or hospital. Without report of an active crime, police officers will not respond in these cases.

Additionally, in some situations where there is concern for imminent injury, the fire department and/or paramedics show up but cannot help on-scene, as they are not trained in disarmament techniques. Thus, those responders have to wait at a distance until the individual attempting suicidal actions deescalates or becomes unresponsive. In one recent tragic case, an individual called 911 threatening imminent suicide with a samurai sword. The fire team arrived prior to any instance of injury, but had to wait and watch the individual injure themselves and hemorrhage until they became unresponsive prior to providing help and transporting the individual to the hospital. Such events significantly increase the burden of trauma on all

involved—patients and responding individuals involved in response to mental health emergencies in Sacramento County.

To be sure, emergency response to mental health crises is a complex issue. Given the impeccable track record of CWRT, and their increasing burden of responsibility in supporting individuals in mental health crises in Sacramento, this program and the CWRT units that are being dispatched in Sacramento County deserve the county's further attention and support. There are several specific areas of need to help ensure CWRT's long-term sustainability.

- The current BHL technology system used by CWRT is supported by a grant. . The County should ensure that this funding remains ongoing.
- CWRT is in the process of coordinating direct connections from 911 calls for mental health emergencies. This process has already started in Folsom (a more ideal initiation site than Sacramento given lower acuity calls), and a pilot program is now in place for Sacramento 911 calls. However, there is an urgent need for 911 computer-aided dispatch (CAD)-CWRT compatibility and system interoperability, which will require further funding to support.
- CWRT is undergoing caging-in modifications to its 11 vehicles, in order to support higher-acuity transports. This is particularly useful for the aforementioned individuals suffering from acute psychotic episodes who can benefit from urgent transport to the Sacramento County Mental Health Urgent Care Center.

PHAB respectfully requests that the Board of Supervisors take the following actions:

1. Approve and enthusiastically support 911-CWRT interoperability in Sacramento County.
2. Maintain funding to ensure longevity of the BHL technology system that hosts the 988 calls and directs CWRT units to callers.
3. Continue to grow and support programs like CWRT to further support individuals in Sacramento County during mental health crises.
4. Facilitate and support coordination between CWRT, 988 and the Triage to Alternate Destination programs.
5. Continue to monitor responses to calls involving a behavioral health crisis.

We thank you for your time and attention to this urgent County matter.

Sincerely,

## The Sacramento County Public Health Advisory Board