

## Public Advocate Jumaane Williams criticizes new de Blasio approach to 911 mental crises calls



*NYC Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams speaks to parents, children, teachers, and other allies of School District 1 in Columbus Park during "March for Schools & Our Lives" Thursday, Sept. 17, 2020 in Manhattan, New York. (Barry Williams/for New York Daily News)*

Mayor de Blasio's new plan for handling 911 calls about mental health emergencies doesn't go far enough to change police practices, said Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and a group of nonprofit leaders.

"I'm ... glad to finally see action taken toward realizing this goal, but cognizant of the reality that if the administration were not so resistant to reform, we would have advanced much further by this point," Williams said in a Wednesday statement.

"The mayor's announcement ... lacks the scope and specifics that we need," he said. "We need more details on where and how this program will operate, but some of the details we have now are concerning."

Last year, Williams called for the city to create a non-NYPD phone number that people could call for mental health crises, among other measures aimed at taking such incidents out of the hands of law enforcement.

Under the de Blasio plan announced Tuesday, special teams consisting of mental health

professionals and EMS staff will be sent to 911 calls for mental health episodes deemed safe. Cops will still respond to calls that are considered dangerous.

The program will begin as a pilot in two neighborhoods yet to be determined.

"The exclusion of 'peers,' or people with lived experience of mental health crises, from the proposed pilot is a mistake," said Cal Hedigan, CEO of nonprofit group Community Access. "By continuing to rely on 911 and excluding peers, this new pilot leaves a lot of room for business as usual to continue, as subjective determinations of potential risk lead to an over-deployment of law enforcement."

De Blasio spokesman Bill Neidhardt described the new plans as the "absolutely necessary first steps we must take as a society to help people facing a mental health crisis, not treat them as criminals."

"There is a long road ahead for justice, and we looking forward to continuing to move this work forward," he said.