

Mediation Matters

“Una vida es demasiado”

Advocates call for better intervention training for NYPD



It's not enough.

One year after police shot and killed Deborah Danner, a 66-year-old Bronx woman experiencing a mental breakdown, mental health advocates insist that little has changed regarding NYPD's handling of incidents involving emotionally disturbed individuals.

To commemorate Danner's death, activists gathered at City Hall on October 18 to call on the city to do more to help police deal with people in emotional crisis.

Danner, who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, was killed in her Castle Hill apartment after police responded to a 911 call of a woman acting erratically. Danner was shot by NYPD Sargent Hugh Barry after Danner was reported to have swung a baseball bat at him.

Three additional emotionally disturbed individuals have been killed by the NYPD since Danner's death, activists pointed out.

“It's turning out that the person calling for help is the one that's ending up dead. It needs to stop,” said Angela Owens, the daughter of James Owens, who was killed by police in January after brandishing a knife at officers. At



“One life is too many,” said Lorenzo Diggs.



"We need mobile crisis teams, we need co-response teams," said Community Access's Carla Rabinowitz.

City Hall, advocates called for the revival of the Mayor's Task Force on Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice, which was convened in 2014 to create new, non-police responses to crisis calls.

"We need mobile crisis teams, we need co-response teams," said Carla Rabinowitz, Advocacy Coordinator of Community Access. "That's police and mental health professionals or peers with real experience riding with the police or meeting the police there."

"We have the answers here — this task force existed, it had the right voices at the table. We're just asking that it be reconvened," said James Mutton, Director of NYC Operations for Concern for Independent Living.



Advocates gathered at City Hall.

Rabinowitz said at least 15,000 officers, or about 40 percent of the police force, should receive crisis intervention training to learn how to build empathy and de-escalate with emotionally disturbed individuals.

"It's giving officers the tools of the training, but also orienting them to a different way of policing so they can comfortably engage in conversation," said Rabinowitz.

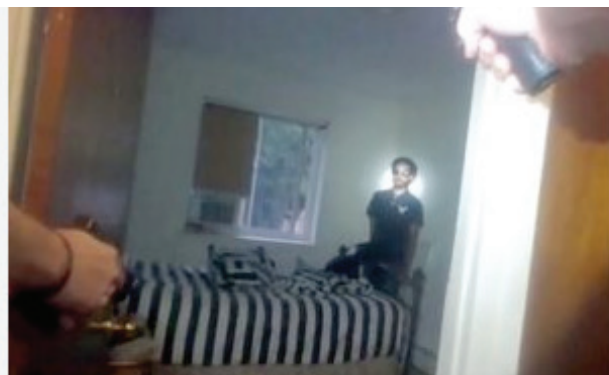
She noted the NYPD's release of a video of the fatal shooting of Bronx resident Miguel Richards on September 6. Two officers shot the mentally ill Richards, armed with a knife and a toy gun, in his Eastchester apartment.

"It was a 17-minute video. Not once did the officers try to engage in conversation," said Rabinowitz, who insisted that officers should have shown more empathy.

"We all know that de-escalation works," said Mutton. "If we have the right people, the right teams at a situation, nine times out of ten, you can talk your way out of a crisis."

"There's got to be a better task force, and some discipline needs to be made, on these officers that are taking actions and hurting loved ones," said Mildred Galarza, whose brother Ariel was killed by a police stun gun last November after cops were called to his home while he was experiencing an emotional crisis.

"How many more killings have to occur by police of emotionally disturbed people before we get change?" said attorney Sanford Rubenstein, who represents the Owens and Galarza families.



Bronx resident Miguel Richards was killed in September.

The city has already provided more than 7,000 NYPD officers with crisis intervention training, and plans to train all 23,000 patrol officers by 2018, according to the Mayor's office.

In 2016, the city also launched co-response teams comprised of NYPD officers and Health Department clinicians who engage people with mental illness who are deemed at risk to themselves or the community.



Councilmember Vanessa Gibson issued remarks.

“This administration has made an unprecedented \$850 million commitment to make sure New Yorkers struggling with mental illness or substance abuse disorder have access to the care they need,” said City Hall spokesperson Olivia Lapeyrolerie.

But intervention specialist Lorenzo Diggs said the city is still not doing enough, based on the number of NYPD-related deaths that have occurred.

“What it does is undermine the philosophy that police officers care about helping citizens,” said Diggs. “One life is one too many.”