

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lynsey Billet
lynsey@anatgerstein.com
(347) 361-8449



Multiple Organizations and Coalitions, Representing Hundreds of Agencies and Individuals, Send Letter Calling on Mayor Bill de Blasio to Rethink Mental Health Crisis Reforms

- [Letter to Mayor de Blasio](#)

(New York, NY, 10/8/19) – Yesterday, more than a dozen organizations and coalitions – representing hundreds of agencies and individual New Yorkers – sent a letter to Mayor Bill de Blasio urging him to consider several key developments before releasing the final report outlining the recommendations of the Mayor’s Task Force on Crisis Prevention and Response.

The signatories of the letter include **Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled, Bronx Independent Living Center, CCITNYC, Community Access, Concern for Independent Living, Inc., Center for Constitutional Rights, JustLeadershipUSA, Mobilization for Justice, NAMI NYC, New York Civil Liberties Union, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS), National Center for Law and Economic Justice, Police Reform Organizing Project, Christina Sparrock, CPA, Peer Specialist, Tamar Lavy, MD, Peter Stastny, MD, and Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project.**

The Mayor commissioned the Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force in 2018 to reform New York City’s response to people experiencing mental health crises. Since then, advocates have been awaiting the final report with recommendations for reform. In the meantime, New Yorkers experiencing mental health crises who call for assistance are met with a strictly police response.

The letter, received by the Mayor’s office yesterday, calls on the de Blasio Administration to:

- Commit to a health-first approach. Mental health crises are public health issues that should be triaged and responded to with trained medical and mental health workers, as well as peers with lived experience, instead of police officers.
- Allocate resources to address the underlying causes of mental health crises. By investing in preventive measures such as mental health urgent care centers, crisis respite centers, safe havens and 24/7 help lines, the city can reduce the number of overall 911 health-related emergencies.
- Establish an oversight body comprised of government and elected officials, members of impacted communities, the peer community, providers, and policy experts to oversee the implementation of the final recommendations.

Experts and members of impacted communities agree: the best way to move ahead is to take the responsibility for responding to New Yorkers in mental health crisis away from the police.

Peggy Herrera of JustLeadershipUSA says, "Police are not trained to respond to mental health crises, and they shouldn't be the ones responding. When my son was experiencing a crisis, I called for help, and EMS showed up, but with the police. The police escalated the entire situation, and the officers arrested me when I tried to keep them from interacting with my son. The Mayor must take leadership to create a system that can actually provide the response that my son needs in a moment of crisis."

Ruth Lowenkron, Director of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest says, "Mental health crises must be treated like the health issues they are, and be responded to by health care professionals and 'peers' who have experienced their own mental health crises – as is done in municipalities around the country."

Bob Gangi, Executive Director of Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP), states "All too often when police respond to emergencies involving New Yorkers in psychiatric crisis, the result is harm to the person in need, even loss of life at the hands of officers. Time for the city to develop a more effective and humane response: instead of police, send mental health professionals & mediation specialists. SAVE LIVES, NOT TAKE THEM."

"People with disabilities and people of color with disabilities, in particular, are more likely to be harmed, killed, or otherwise have their lives and livelihoods disrupted when interactions with law enforcement go wrong," said **Britney Wilson, staff attorney at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice**. "That is why these reforms are so critical."

Carla Rabinowitz, Advocacy Coordinator at Community Access and Project Coordinator at CCITNYC says, "Numerous organizations representing thousands of people living in NYC request the Mayor work with Public Advocate Jumaane Williams to enact reforms here in New York City. Specifically, our organizations and nonprofits want to see a health response to crisis calls. One example of such a model, known as CAHOOTS, exists in Eugene, Oregon. We also call on the Mayor to focus on expanding options for people in acute distress, such as mental health urgent care centers. Furthermore, we want a planning process that incorporates all those working on these issues, with peers – those with lived experience – at all levels of planning, design, and implementation. These 200,000 crisis calls per year can no longer be responded to by police, or co-response teams with police leading the way. We want an entirely new system. We want a mental health response to a mental health crisis."

These groups demand the Mayor act swiftly and intentionally to create a more humane, compassionate, and appropriate crisis response system in New York City.

About CCITNYC:

Communities for Crisis Intervention Team Training in New York City was formed in 2012 to respond to the numerous deaths and injuries of individuals experiencing mental health crises that had occurred at the hands of the police. Our members include over 85 nonprofit providers, advocates, family members, and concerned citizens, as well as 400 people who have had personal experience with the public mental health system and crisis services – the real experts.

www.ccitnyc.org

About Community Access:

Community Access' mission is to expand opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

www.communityaccess.org

About JustLeadershipUSA:

JustLeadershipUSA is dedicated to cutting the US correctional population in #halfby2030. JLUSA empowers people most affected by incarceration to drive policy reform. Through targeted advocacy, strengthening leadership and membership support, JustLeadershipUSA believes a decarcerated America is possible.

About NCLEJ:

For more than half a century, the National Center for Law and Economic Justice (NCLEJ) has advanced the cause of justice for low-income families, individuals, and communities across the country through litigation, policy analysis, and support for grassroots organizing. Our work addresses a broad range of issues that impact low-income individuals and communities that disproportionately experience poverty, including preserving and maintaining access to government benefits; protecting and securing the rights of low-wage workers; combatting unlawful debt collection; and advocating for people with disabilities.

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest:

NYLPI has been a leader in civil rights advocacy in New York City for over forty years, prioritizing the rights of persons with disabilities generally, and specifically fighting to reform the way New York City responds to those who experience mental health crises.

About PROP:

PROP is a policy analysis and advocacy organization that works to expose and end abusive and discriminatory NYPD practices.

###