

For Immediate Release

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CCIT-NYC Statement on the Death of Daniel Prude

(New York, NY, 9/10/20) – Daniel Prude's brutal death at the hands of the Rochester Police Department is horrifying and unacceptable. We send our condolences to his family and loved ones, and to the Rochester community that is grieving his loss.

Police, trained to ensure submission and arrest and overly reliant on the use of physical force, are not the proper responders to a person experiencing a mental health crisis.

A “peer” with lived, mental health experience, trained in de-escalation technique and paired with an EMT, would have responded more humanely and effectively to Mr. Prude’s health and emotional needs, rather than violently escalate the crisis, as occurred.

Mr. Prude should be alive today.

We cannot continue to criminalize individuals in crisis. It is unjust, including for our police officers, and dangerous to those most in need of care.

This is not the first such killing of this kind, nor will it be the last, unless we move now to enact change.

CCIT-NYC calls for the immediate removal of mental health crisis response from law enforcement’s responsibilities, not just in New York but across the country, and the implementation of new, mental health teams.

We stand with the people of Rochester, who for the last seven days have risked their own safety to call out this injustice.

Alternative, proven models for handling these crises successfully already exist, such as in Eugene, Oregon. Cities like San Francisco, Portland, Los Angeles, and Toronto are now also moving away from a reliance on police. New York must do the same, and must do so now.

Cal Hedigan, Chief Executive Officer of Community Access, says, “Far too many New Yorkers in need of a health care response have been met with police officers who are ill-equipped to provide the compassionate care that is required. Our state did not need yet another horrific example of the consequences of 'help' arriving in a police car. We continue to call for a non-law enforcement response to those experiencing mental health crises. The problem is plain, and

any further time the government spends failing to act leaves more New Yorkers at risk of a violent, and far too often deadly, encounter with law enforcement.”

Ruth Lowenkron, Director of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and a member of CCIT-NYC’s steering committee, says, “Not one more death at the hands of police of a person experiencing a mental health crisis. We must fund appropriate mental health services, remove police from mental health crisis responses, and ensure that police body-worn camera footage is immediately available to the public should anything go awry.”

Ashwin Vasan, President and CEO, Fountain House, says, “The tragic death of Daniel Prude comes alongside a growing recognition that mental health professionals, not law enforcement, must be first responders to mental health emergencies. This is not a new idea and proven models that pair a crisis worker or peer with a medic have been replicated across the country. Instead of law enforcement responding, trained medical and mental health professionals or people with a lived mental health experience arrive to offer crisis counseling, conflict resolution, and welfare checks. It’s an approach that has saved lives and money.”

Christina Sparrock, Mental Health Advocate, Regional Board Member of Citizen Action of New York City and a member of CCIT-NYC’s steering committee, says, “This is not acceptable, people with disabilities lives matter! People in emotional crisis must be treated with the same dignity and respect as others at all times. Our federal, state, and city government must fund appropriate mental health services that require trained crisis responders, who are not the police, to assist and care for those in immediate need.”

About Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC (www.ccitnyc.org)

Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC is a coalition of over 80 organizations and more than 500 stakeholders whose mission is to transform how the City responds to mental health crises by diverting responses to mental health recipients away from law enforcement.

About Community Access (www.communityaccess.org)

Established in 1974, Community Access, one of the CCIT-NYC coalition's leaders, expands opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services.

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