



# MEMORANDUM

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## LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

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**To:** Ald. Chantia Lewis  
**From:** Dana J. Zelazny, Legislative Reference Bureau  
**Date:** July 9, 2020  
**Subject:** ALTERNATIVES TO POLICE RESPONSE

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This memo was prepared in response to your request for information about alternatives to law enforcement response to certain types of 9-1-1 calls for service.

There has been significant interest in different models for responding to calls for services, both emergency and non-emergency, that have traditionally been routed to armed law enforcement personnel. Principally, there is a desire to provide unarmed, non-law enforcement responders to calls for service arising from non-criminal crises, including mental and behavioral health issues, homelessness, intoxication and dispute resolution.

The impetus for shifting to a non-police response for certain incidents is two-fold – first, that police officers may not have the training and resources to respond appropriately to non-criminal situations, particularly those involving issues of mental health, substance abuse and homelessness. The addition of police officers to non-criminal situations may unnecessarily escalate an incident and lead to incarceration or other criminal sanctions for what was initially non-criminal behavior. By providing non-law enforcement responders, escalation and incarceration may be avoided and individuals in crisis may be better served with counseling, mediation, transportation and referral to appropriate resources. Second, shifting responsibility for responding to non-violent, mental health, substance abuse and homelessness issues frees up police officers to respond to public safety emergencies involving violence and/or criminal activities. This may also provide a mechanism for diverting resources to municipal budgets outside of law enforcement, satisfying demands in many cities to defund police budgets.

A number of cities have publically discussed establishing alternative first-response options, primarily in relation to efforts to reduce police budgets. According to Eugene officials, leadership from nearly 20 cities — including Austin, Chicago, Oakland, Denver, New York City and Portland — have recently reached out to learn more about Eugene's unique CAHOOTS partnership, as discussed below. However, the Legislative Reference Bureau was unable to identify any other city that had actually implemented such a program.

## **Eugene, OR**

Eugene established a specialized, mobile mental health team called Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) in 1989. CAHOOTS is a partnership between a local social work and outreach clinic and the Eugene Police Department. CAHOOTS teams provide support for Eugene police personnel by taking on many of the social service-type calls for service and providing crisis counseling. CAHOOTS personnel often provide initial contact and transport for people who are intoxicated, mentally ill, or disoriented, as well as transport for non-emergency medical care.

CAHOOTS teams are staffed with personnel from a contracted local clinic using City of Eugene vehicles, and teams are triaged and dispatched through Eugene's emergency communications facility alongside traditional police and fire dispatching. Each vehicle is staffed with a medic (nurse or EMT) and an experienced crisis worker. Crisis workers receive 500 hours of crisis intervention training. If a police officer responding to an incident evaluates a scene and determines that CAHOOTS would be more appropriate than a law enforcement presence, the officer can request a CAHOOTS response and leave the scene after their arrival.

In 2018, CAHOOTS responded to 23,000 calls, about 17% of Eugene's 9-1-1 calls. Officials report that based on call volume, demand for CAHOOTS services has increased by over 58% from 2014–2017, outpacing the available assistance in the community. Eugene recently increased the CAHOOTS contract to expand services and provide more coverage in responding to people experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis. For the last five years, CAHOOTS has also provided services in nearby Springfield, OR.

Eugene funds CAHOOTS services within city limits through the Eugene Police Department. Eugene's annual budget for CAHOOTS has been steady at about \$800,000, which funds 31 hours of service per day (including overlapping coverage), seven days a week. One mobile unit is typically staffed and on-duty 24 hours a day and another team provides overlap coverage 7 hours per day. In 2020, Eugene increased the CAHOOTS contract by \$281,000 to expand overlap coverage to 11 hours per day to address increased demand for services. CAHOOTS employs about 40 staff members, mostly full time, to cover the Eugene and Springfield service areas.

Eugene's 2020 budget for police services, including emergency communications, investigations, patrol, police records and police administration, was \$59.2 million. Eugene employs about 192 sworn police officers and 136 civilian employees. The total 2020 CAHOOTS budget of about \$1.1 million is approximately 1.9% of the Eugene police services budget. Lane County, which includes Springfield, OR, provides an additional \$800,000 in funding to cover the service area expansion to Springfield.

CAHOOTS officials estimate that the program has saved \$6 million in medical services costs (the time-frame for this assertion is unclear, as is whether the savings were to Eugene's municipal budget or to local health providers).

### **Portland, OR (pop. 653,115)**

Portland's police agency currently includes a Behavioral Health Unit, responsible for following up on referrals from police officers. Through this unit, two teams, each made up of an officer and a mental health clinician, check in on referred individuals five days a week. Approximately 1,000 referrals are made to BHU annually. BHU also coordinates a partnership with a local behavioral health clinic which allows officers round-the-clock access to emergency health clinicians who are available to respond to calls with officers on request.

In late 2019, Portland set aside \$500,000 to pilot an alternative first response option, the Portland Street Response program, in a single neighborhood. The program will be staffed with a combination of emergency medical technicians, mental health professionals and crisis counselors to respond to 9-1-1 calls involving mental health or homelessness. No further information about the success of the pilot is available, but Portland officials recently allocated an additional \$4.8 million to expand the program in 2021. Increased funding for the program was tied to efforts by local activists to defund the Portland police budget.

### **Albuquerque, NM (pop. 516,218)**

In June 2020, Albuquerque announced a new Albuquerque Community Safety (ACS) department as a third branch of the city's public safety (police and fire) department. This new service will allow un-armed professionals to respond to emergency calls for non-violent crimes, rather than armed police officers. ACS will respond to 9-1-1 calls relating to inebriation, homelessness, addiction and mental health. All calls for emergency services will still go through Albuquerque's 9-1-1 system, but from the initial intake process, targeted calls would be re-routed to ACS. ACS staff will be made up of social workers, housing and homelessness specialists, and violence prevention and diversion program experts. Similar to Eugene's CAHOOTS program, ACS is intended to avoid escalating non-criminal, non-violent situations, and free up police officers to focus on violent crime.

Albuquerque officials have stated that the reorganization of public safety services can primarily be accomplished through local action, but that some aspects may need court or U.S. Department of Justice approval. Albuquerque has been under court oversight for police reform since 2014 in response to a federal investigation which found that police officers acted in a pattern and practice of excessive force. In contrast to Eugene's CAHOOTS program, ACS will apparently function as a municipal department with city employees operating in parallel to the police department, rather than as a contracted service under the aegis of the police department. No information as to expected funding and staffing is available at this time.

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