

Dear Village Trustees and Staff,

Nearly four years ago, the Village established the Alternative Calls for Service Task Force for Mental Health Crisis following the release of the BerryDunn Essential Calls for Service Evaluation Report, which recommended developing an alternative response model that reduces police involvement in appropriate behavioral health crises.

The Task Force studied crisis response models, engaged experts and community members, and developed recommendations intended to create a more effective, health-centered, and less police-dependent approach to behavioral health crisis response. Those recommendations were presented to the Village Board in June 2023.

The Task Force Recommendations Remain Unchanged

The Task Force reached a clear and unanimous conclusion: Oak Park should reduce the role of police officers in mental health crisis response whenever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

The recommendations emphasized a mental-health-centered response model built around behavioral health expertise, community-based care, and post-crisis support services.

Key principles of the Task Force recommendations included:

- Reducing police involvement in appropriate mental health crisis calls.
- Utilizing behavioral health professionals as primary responders whenever appropriate.
- Expanding post-crisis support and service connection.
- Building a response model rooted in health care and community support rather than law enforcement.
- Strengthening long-term behavioral health outcomes for residents and families.

This approach reflects models already operating successfully in communities across the country.

Key Concerns With the Current Phase 2 Proposal

The Task Force remains concerned that the current proposal differs substantially from the recommendations presented in June 2023 and has not been accompanied by a clear explanation of why a different direction is being pursued.

Key concerns include:

- Continued embedding of police officers within the response structure despite the Task Force recommendation to reduce police involvement where appropriate.
- Expansion of the model beyond mental health crisis calls into broader categories of community service response.

- Lack of clearly defined responder roles, operational decision-making criteria, and outcome measures.
- Limited evidence demonstrating why a standing police-involved co-response structure is necessary or what deficiencies in the current system it is intended to address.
- Ongoing reliance on operational and staffing discussions without clearly identifying the specific mental health outcomes expected to improve.
- Potential duplication of existing community-based behavioral health infrastructure and relationships.
- Long-term operational and staffing costs that have not yet been clearly tied to demonstrated need, measurable outcomes, or community benefit.
- Lack of a clearly articulated pathway toward reducing police involvement over time.
- Significant questions regarding service navigation, referral pathways, and timely access to behavioral health care remain unresolved, despite substantial discussion regarding response models, staffing structures, and operational design.

Existing Community Expertise Should Remain Central

The Task Force recognizes and appreciates the Village's investment in initiatives such as ECHO, which provide valuable community support services, especially to our community's unhoused population. However, ECHO was not designed to address the behavioral health crisis response objectives that were the primary focus of the Task Force's work and recommendations

Oak Park already benefits from established behavioral health providers and community organizations with decades of experience supporting residents experiencing mental health challenges and crisis situations.

Any future response model should strengthen and coordinate with this existing expertise rather than create parallel systems that weaken established community relationships.

The Task Force encourages the Village to:

- Preserve and leverage trusted behavioral health expertise and community relationships.
- Strengthen coordination between first responders and community-based providers.
- Expand connections to post-crisis services, follow-up care, and long-term support systems.

Trustee Considerations

The Task Force believes it has fulfilled the charge originally given to it by the Village through years of research, community engagement, and policy development. We respectfully encourage the Village and Board to give full and meaningful consideration to the recommendations developed through that process as future policy and implementation decisions are made.

Should the Village seek future Task Force involvement, we request that engagement be tied to clearly defined implementation questions, evaluation efforts, or policy issues where the Task Force's expertise,

recommendations, and prior work will play a meaningful role in shaping decision-making and future direction.

If Village leadership chooses to pursue a different direction than the recommendations developed by the Task Force, we respectfully request that Trustees require a clear explanation of:

- How the proposed model aligns with, modifies, or departs from the Task Force recommendations;
- The specific problem the proposed model intends to solve that was not addressed in the Task Force recommendations or identified by the BerryDunn report;
- The evidence supporting the need for a standing police-involved co-response model.;
- How the proposed approach will improve outcomes for residents experiencing mental health crises;
- How success, effectiveness, and community impact will ultimately be measured and reported; and
- How implementation, evaluation, and future expansion decisions will be communicated to the public.

Thank you for your attention to this incredibly important issue. We are grateful for the Trustee's commitment to the safety and care of our Oak Park residents who experience a mental health crisis.

Sincerely,

Alternative Calls for Service Task Force for Mental Health Crisis Members