

Disclaimer: Draft recommendations have in no way been endorsed by the Connecticut Bar Association. They are being shared with the State Task Force to help facilitate our discussion and consideration of potential recommendations.

Recommendation:

The CBATF recommends that the CBA establish a subcommittee of the CBATF (the “Advisory Committee”) to support the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (the “DESPP”) and municipal police chiefs and other municipal officers as they evaluate the feasibility and impact of adopting a mobile crisis unit approach to public safety as required by Section 18 of An Act Concerning Police Accountability, Bill 6004 (“the Act”). The responsibilities of the Advisory Committee would include: 1) working with the Yale Law School Justice Collaboratory and the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University to develop a “tool kit” setting out best practices for evaluating and implementing mobile crisis units; 2) working with CBA leadership to recruit and train an advocacy team (the “Advocacy Team”) of attorneys, police chiefs, educators, and social workers to deliver the tool kits to assist DESPP and police departments in preparing evaluations which the Act mandates they submit to the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council (“POST”) by January 31, 2021.

The CBATF further recommends that Section 18 of the Act be expanded to include a comprehensive feasibility study on the use of social workers and mobile crisis units by police in Connecticut. In support of this study, the CBATF, in collaboration with the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force, would assess the DESPP and police evaluations submitted to POST on the use of social workers to respond remotely to calls for assistance, to respond in person to such calls and/or to accompany police officers on calls where the experience and training of a social worker could provide assistance.

Rationale:

Section 18 of the Act states:

“Not later than six months after the effective date of this section, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and each municipal police department shall complete an evaluation of the feasibility and potential impact of the use of social workers by the department for the purpose of remotely responding to calls for assistance, responding in person to such calls or accompanying a police officer on calls where the experience and training of a social worker could provide assistance. Such evaluation shall consider whether responses to certain calls and community interactions could be managed entirely by a social worker or benefit from the assistance of a social worker. Municipal police departments shall additionally consider whether the municipality that the police department serves would benefit from employing, contracting with or otherwise engaging social workers to assist the municipal police department. Municipal police departments may consider the use of mobile crisis teams or implementing a regional approach with other municipalities as part of any process to engage or further engage social workers to assist municipal police departments. The Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection and each municipal police department shall submit such evaluation immediately upon completion to the

Police Officer Standards and Training Council established under section 7- 294b of the general statutes.

The mobile crisis team approach to public safety is well known in some Connecticut programs, particularly with respect to responses to children and adolescents and others experiencing behavioral or mental health needs or crises. [See “Mobile Crisis Intervention Services Performance Improvement Center \(PIC\) Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2019](#). Several Connecticut cities have adopted or are adopting mobile crisis unit (or "Co-Responder Team" or “Crisis Intervention Team”) strategies. See, for example, descriptions of programs in [Hartford, New Haven, and a consortium comprised of Suffield, Windsor Locks, East Windsor and Granby](#). Moreover, the movement to mobile crisis team approaches to public safety has been robustly supported by recommendations by the United States Department of Justice and by funding provided by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. See, for example, [Law Enforcement Best Practices: Lessons Learned from the Field](#); [Building Safer Communities: Improving Police Responses to Persons with Mental Illness](#); and [Police Mental Health Collaborations: A Framework for Implementing Effective Law Enforcement Responses for People Who Have Mental Health Needs](#). Both President Donald Trump and President-Elect Joe Biden have expressed support for the co-responder model. See [Trump Executive Order on Safe Policing for Safe Communities](#) and [Joe Biden's Criminal Justice Policy](#).

The mere fact that the General Assembly has mandated that police departments submit feasibility and impact studies is no guarantee that the opportunities created by the legislation will be fully grasped. While some departments will see the Act as an opportunity to recommend imaginative movements toward adoption of mobile crisis unit policing, the responses are almost certain to be highly variable. If we wish to see the DESPP and the municipalities meaningfully consider these possibilities, we must support their efforts by supplying them with the resources and advocacy necessary to fully understand the options available to them.