

**Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Montgomery County  
Testimony on Special Appropriation to the County Government's FY21 Operating Budget,  
DHHS - \$592,202 for Mobile Crisis Response  
July 7, 2020**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Montgomery County, which represents over 2,600 members, supports the special appropriation of \$592,202 to fund mobile crisis response in Montgomery County. SURJ supports a community mental health model in which licensed mental health professionals respond to situations that involve mental health concerns. Robert White and Finan Berhe, both killed by MCPD in the past two years, would likely still be alive if Montgomery County had already implemented a community mental health model.

SURJ MoCo urges the Council to create a culturally appropriate Montgomery County model based on Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Street (CAHOOTS) a mental health crisis intervention program in Eugene, OR that has been replicated across the country.

This model must be implemented as quickly as possible to support a fully-funded program with 24/7 response capacity in all districts of the county. Program staff should include, but not be limited to, licensed social workers, professional counselors and marriage and family therapists. Staff must reflect the diverse county in which they serve - linguistically, racially, and culturally - and they should be grounded in anti-racism and cultural competence.

The county community mental health response team should be part of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, fully funded by cost savings from money reallocated from MCPD. SURJ rejects any model that includes officers from the Montgomery County Police Department as part of any response related to mental health.

Mental health professionals should dispatch through 911 to ensure that a community mental health team is deployed on mental health emergency calls. Dispatchers should be trained to work in tandem with mental health dispatchers, and first responders should be trained to know when to contact the community mental health response team.

SURJ urges the Council to seek input from impacted communities for the development and implementation of the program. In addition, we demand public access to data to evaluate the program on an annual basis. A working group of impacted residents should be created to work closely with the community mental health response team to ensure that implementation of the model meets community needs and is responsive to cultural and racial barriers to accessing mental health care.

Finally, we recommend a county-wide public education campaign that provides information on how to access the community mental health response team. In addition, the county should

adopt peer health educator and peer counselor approaches that have worked to create greater trust and access to mental health services in other jurisdictions.

Thank you to Councilmember Hucker and all co-sponsoring councilmembers for this necessary step toward creating a county that is safer and healthier for all residents, but especially those most affected by lack of community resources and overpolicing.