



NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Lee Harris, Mayor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SHELBY COUNTY MAYOR AND SHELBY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE ANNOUNCE
EFFORT TO EMBED TRAINED
MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WITH FIRST RESPONDERS**

Shelby County Sheriff's Deputies will have the ability to co-respond and proactively work alongside mental health professionals to better divert residents experiencing a mental health crisis from the criminal justice system to the healthcare that they need; part of multi-pronged effort to expand access to mental healthcare and get at root causes of crime.

Shelby County, TN – Today, Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris and Sheriff Floyd Bonner, Jr. announce a new effort that will place trained mental health professionals in the field with Shelby County Sheriff's deputies. This will allow embedded clinical professionals to work alongside the Sheriff's Crisis Intervention Team, to divert those experiencing a mental health crisis from the criminal justice system to appropriate services.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one in five Americans are affected by mental illness each year, and distress calls that involve mental illness require 87% more time and resources for the responding agency. In addition to co-responding with CIT trained deputies, the mental health professionals will work proactively with community health and service providers to connect residents with services that address their mental illness and reduce the likelihood that they must call in distress again. The effort to embed mental health professionals with first responders and co-respond to mental health crises builds on Sheriff Bonner's commitment to decriminalize mental health patients and Mayor Lee Harris' slate of mental health reforms that include direct transport by first responders to mental health care, certified training of



dispatchers who handle mental health, behavioral emergency, and suicide calls, and a doubling of the capacity of Shelby County's Mental Health Court.

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris: “The pandemic made it even more clear that our community needs to focus on addressing mental health. We know that many in our community will cope with severe mental illness at some point in their lives. All too often, residents with persistent mental health issues end up in our criminal justice system instead of in an appropriate healthcare setting. This effort to embed mental health professionals with our first responders will help divert those in crisis to the help they need and reduce their reliance on 9-1-1 distress calls. I applaud Sheriff Bonner and his team for their constant commitment to addressing the persistent challenge of responding to mental health crisis calls.”

Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner, Jr.: “I am excited to participate in this revolutionary endeavor which extends the great community partnerships we established 35 years ago through the Crisis Intervention Team program. The teamwork has benefited countless individuals who live, struggle, and cope daily with mental illness and substance use. I brought the idea of having mental health professionals respond with our CIT members to Community Services Director Dorcas Young Griffin and she and the mayor worked their magic to make it a reality. We look forward to expanding our work with Alliance Healthcare Services and are grateful to Mayor Harris and the Shelby County Board of Commissioners for their support of this important new program.”

Alliance Healthcare Services CEO Laurie Powell: “Alliance Healthcare Services would like to thank Sheriff Bonner, Mayor Lee Harris, Director Young Griffin, and the Shelby County Board of Commissioners for this opportunity. By pairing mental health professionals with law enforcement, those who need mental health and substance use treatment will get the help they need. This is a cutting-edge approach that strives to reduce unnecessary incarceration for vulnerable individuals.”

Shelby County Community Services Director Dorcas Young Griffin: “This effort to ensure law enforcement has mental health supports embedded in their work is trailblazing for our community. We know that to increase public safety, and have justice, we must do things differently. Shelby County Government looks forward to working hand in hand with Sheriff Bonner and Alliance Healthcare Services to ensure folks get the help they need.”

On Monday, April 11th, the Shelby County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution that authorized Shelby County Community Services to contract with Alliance Healthcare Services to staff and oversee the mental health professionals. The contract is funded through federal dollars and will provide for the training, salaries, and equipment to be used by the mental health professionals.

(End of Release)