



July 20, 2022

Public Comment Regarding Agenda Item 29

Care First applauds the City of South Pasadena for being a regional leader by implementing a mobile crisis response van alongside other San Gabriel Valley cities. We recognize that this as an important first step away from deploying law enforcement to address non-violent crises involving mental health, substance use, and people experiencing homelessness.

We have feedback regarding several components of the program, as currently contemplated.

First, it appears that the existing plan is a co-response by the mobile crisis van *and* public safety officers (police and/or fire) for all 911 calls for non-violent mental health and/or homelessness. Co-response even for non-violent dispatches defeats the purpose of implementing a mobile crisis response van. Many unhoused people and people experiencing mental health problems distrust law enforcement for a variety of reasons, including for example, past negative experiences, the coercive power of the police to cite, arrest, and commit individuals, and the possibility that an interaction with the police will be violent (*e.g.*, a welfare check that resulted in the shooting and killing of Vanessa Marquez). Changing that dynamic and building trust with unhoused people in our community will require, in many cases, a fresh introduction of the crisis response team independent from law enforcement. **Care First asks the City to deploy the crisis response van without law enforcement presence for all non-violent incidents.**

Second, the hours of the mobile crisis van will likely be too limited for the needs of South Pasadena. Care First's review of the dispatch records produced by the City (aka the Media Log) reflect 2,239 calls for a welfare check between 2017-2021, which is roughly 37 calls per month for that period. The dispatch records also show about 17% of all dispatches are nuisance-related, including calls for suspicious persons, suspicious circumstances, and disturbances. A diminishingly small percentage of the dispatch activities respond to calls reporting violent crime. Less than 1% or only 1,223 dispatches over a five year period (2017–2021) were responses to violent incidents. In other words, the needs of the South Pasadena community for mental health welfare checks and responding to non-violent mental health, substance use, and homelessness is likely to exceed the availability of services given that the crisis response van will only spend 10 hours per week in South Pasadena. **Care First asks the City to use the \$200,000 it allocated for the mobile crisis van to bolster services in our City.**

Finally, the staff memo discusses the need for objective metrics to study the success of the mobile crisis van, but does not specify what those metrics will be. Care First cautions the City that expecting the mobile crisis van to be able to connect the unhoused residents in our community with services—in addition to responding to mental health crises and substance use crises in three cities—may set the program up for failure. The formation of trusting



relationships and ongoing case management for unhoused individuals is a challenging job unto itself. It is distinct from 911 dispatch for emergency mental health crises.¹ **We ask that you involve Care First in determining what metrics the City will use to evaluate the success of the mobile crisis van.**

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and for considering our proposals to make the program stronger.

¹ More broadly, until the region and City make meaningful investments in affordable housing, there is nowhere for unhoused people to go but the streets, parks, libraries, buses and trains. The mobile crisis van cannot work miracles in a severe housing shortage.