

Legislation introduced to divert some 9-1-1 calls to 2-1-1

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing December 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder*



Councilwoman Negron made the Lehigh Valley Good Neighbors Alliance social media when she remarked that 9-1-1 wasn't working well, a remark that was taken to mean she is suggesting that the 9-1-1 system be abolished. Which caused some alarm. And which is not true.

Here's the idea Councilwoman Negron was referencing in a new bill introduced by Senator Casey: "The HELP Act would divert non-criminal, non-fire and non-medical emergency calls from 9-1-1 systems to state and regional 2-1-1 systems [United Way], while providing resources and funding to improve 2-1-1 referral systems."

The idea is to exercise some "discrimination" (pun intended) about what calls police respond to.

Such systems are already in operation as Gadfly learned when he was reviewing programs in cities that were re-imagining how they do public safety and reporting on them here.

In fact, Philadelphia has such a pilot program, but the mental health person was unfortunately not in the dispatch center when the call that would eventuate in the death of Walter Wallace came in.

Selections from “Casey to introduce Police Overhaul that Would Reform the Way Law Enforcement Interacts with People with Disabilities”

Following Spate of Encounters in PA and Across the Nation, Casey’s Bill Would Enhance State and Regional 2-1-1 Call System.

As the Nation reckons with the high profile killings of Black Americans at the hands of police officers and growing calls for policy changes to prevent future violence, U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) is launching the Law Enforcement Education and Accountability for People with Disabilities (LEAD) Initiative, to help bring about racial justice and address the high incidence rate of police violence involving people with disabilities.

The LEAD Initiative is comprised of two bills – the Safe Interactions Act and the Human-services Emergency Logistic Program (HELP) Act – which would reduce calls to 9-1-1 call systems regarding non-criminal emergencies and provide robust training to law enforcement on interacting with people with disabilities, including those experiencing a mental health crisis.

“The families of Walter Wallace, Jr., Ricardo Munoz and Osaze Osagie needed mental health crisis support and they didn’t get it,” said Senator Casey. “We must take action to ensure that someone’s ethnicity or mental ability does not preclude them from receiving protection and fair treatment. My LEAD initiative aims to protect the promise of liberty and justice for all by reforming our emergency systems so that people and police are connected with the resources they need.”

“United Way and the 211 network are deeply grateful to Senator Casey for introducing the HELP Act,” said Suzanne McCormick, U.S. President, United Way Worldwide. “211 is a vital resource supporting over 95 percent of communities in the U.S. and this expansion of coverage means

that more people can get the help they need, particularly those with mental health illnesses and other disabilities. United Way looks forward to working with Senator Casey to expand critical services to the American people during these difficult times.”

The Washington Post database of police shootings estimates that at least 25 percent of shootings involve a person with a mental health disability. A 2016 Ruderman Foundation [report](#) estimated that between one-third and half of 2015 shootings involving a law enforcement officer included a person with a disability.

The HELP Act would divert non-criminal, non-fire and non-medical emergency calls from 9-1-1 systems to state and regional 2-1-1 systems, while providing resources and funding to improve 2-1-1 referral systems. The bill would create an oversight system for the 2-1-1 networks comprised of community members who represent older adults, people with disabilities, ethnic and racial community members and members of other communities.

The Safe Interactions Act would provide grants to enable non-profit disability organizations to develop training programs that support safe interactions between law enforcement officers and people with disabilities. The training would be directed to both new and veteran officers and would include people with disabilities in the training as instructors.

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