

# Past time for the City to have “The Talk”

The Bethlehem Gadfly [Uncategorized](#) April 5, 2021

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

*“Should police be the ones responding when someone is mentally ill?”*

We’re familiar with the phenomenon of **“The Talk”** that Black parents must have with their children at a certain age.

Gadfly’s been hoping that we as a City would have “the talk” with and about the police department as part of the national reckoning with race in the wake of the George Floyd murder and, without implying anything sinister about our police department, national conversations about reimagining how we do public safety.

Gadfly wonders, for instance, what happened to the part of the **July 2020 City Council resolution** to engage with the research on local police by **Holona Ochs** of Lehigh University and her team.

And Gadfly is still stirred by Anna Smith’s **call to action** at that time: “we are at an important moment in our community’s history, and we have an opportunity to do something truly momentous.”

Lehigh Valley Stands Up

*selections from [Farnoush Amiri \(AP\)](#), “[States seek more mental health training for police.](#)” *Morning Call*, April 5, 2021.*



The officer who Cassandra Quinto-Collins says kneeled on her son's neck for over four minutes assured her it was standard protocol for sedating a person experiencing a mental breakdown.

"I was there watching it the whole time," Quinto-Collins told The Associated Press. "I just trusted that they knew what they were doing."

Angelo Quinto's sister had called 911 for help calming him down during an episode of paranoia on Dec. 23. His family says Quinto didn't resist the Antioch, California, officers — one who pushed his knee on the back of his neck, and another who restrained his legs — and the only noise he made was when he twice cried out, "Please don't kill me."

The officers replied, "We're not going to kill you," the family said. Police deny putting pressure on his neck. Three days later, the 30-year-old Navy veteran and Filipino immigrant died at a hospital.

It is the latest stark example of the perils of policing people with mental health issues. In response to several high-profile deaths of people with mental health issues in police custody, lawmakers in at least eight states are introducing legislation to change how law enforcement agencies respond to those in crisis.

The proposals lean heavily on additional training for officers on how to interact with people with mental health problems. It's a common response when lawmakers face widespread outcry over police brutality like the U.S. saw last year following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. But none of the proposals appear to address the root question: Should police be the ones responding when someone is mentally ill?

In California, lawmakers introduced legislation on Feb. 11 that, among other things, would require prospective officers to complete college courses that address mental health, social services and psychology, without requiring a degree.

In New York, lawmakers in January proposed an effort to require law enforcement to complete a minimum of 32 credit hours of training that would include techniques on de-escalation and interacting with people who have mental health issues.

“The training that police have received for the past I’d say 25 years has not changed significantly, and it’s out of date, and it doesn’t meet today’s realities,” said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington-based think tank. “I mean the last thing a mother wants when they call the police is for an officer to use force. Especially in a situation that didn’t call for it because the officers weren’t trained in how to recognize a crisis.”

The Treatment Advocacy Center, a nonprofit dedicated to getting treatment for the mentally ill, concluded in a 2015 report those with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than others.

“The solution that would have the most impact on the problem is to prevent people with mental illness from encountering law enforcement in the first place,” said Elizabeth Sinclair Hancq, co-author of the report.

Since that is not always possible, she said, another solution is to create co-responder programs where a social worker or other mental health professional assists officers on such calls.

For families of victims, who now say they regret calling 911 for help, required training and legislative reform are long overdue.

“In retrospect, it wasn’t the smartest idea to call the police,” said Isabella Collins, the 18-year-old sister of Quinto, who died in California. “But I just wanted him to be able to calm down, and I thought that they could help with that.”

Antioch police didn’t release details of Quinto’s death for more than a month. Police Chief Tammany Brooks has denied that officers used a knee or anything else to put pressure on Quinto’s head, neck or throat. An investigation and autopsy are underway.

Quinto’s family filed a wrongful-death claim against the city in February, claiming he “died as a direct consequence of the unreasonable force used against him.”

“I guess it was really naive of me to think that he wouldn’t get hurt,” Collins said.