



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI | San Francisco

May 8, 2023

Mayor London Breed
City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco CA 94102

Dear Mayor Breed:

When San Francisco launched its Street Crisis Response Teams in 2020, the program was lauded for its progressive, innovative inclusion of a mental health clinician and a peer counselor along with a paramedic to respond to calls for assistance. That a 9-1-1 call for a mental health crisis now results in a response by these teams rather than armed police officers will certainly save lives and help people make the transition to shelter and treatment.

Yet just as other counties are attempting to follow the San Francisco model, a decision was made by the Department of Public Health to transfer the Street Crisis Response Team vans from the Department of Public Health to the Department of Emergency Management and to remove trained mental health clinicians from SCRT vans. Even though the SCRT vans are a program created by the MHSF ordinance, this decision was made with no notice or request for input from the MHSF Implementation Working Group (IWG), responsible for overseeing the city's enactment of the ordinance.

First, we want to advocate for consulting the IWG in all decision-making related to the Mental Health SF ordinance. Second, the city is now not in compliance with the ordinance, which stipulates that SCRT vans be supervised by the Department of Public Health. Finally, it is crucial that trained clinicians be a part of these teams, because they have advanced training in de-escalation and diagnostic evaluation. People with serious mental health conditions, especially those experiencing homelessness, are often deeply mistrustful of institutions and uniformed officers, for reasons including past trauma, past abuse from police officers, and historical patterns of racism. The presence of a trained, non-uniformed clinician is crucial to the successful intervention of these teams.

We support the excellent work of the IWG and are convinced that any material changes to MHSF programs and services must be made in consultation with this body, in accordance with the intent of the MHSF ordinance.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors, NAMI San Francisco

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