

REPORT FROM

OFFICE OF THE CITY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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Council File No. 22-0978-S2

Council District: All

To: Honorable Members of the City Council

From: Matthew W. Szabo, City Administrative Officer



Subject: **REPORT ON HIRING, TRAINING PRACTICES, AND POLICY PROTOCOLS FOR POLICE SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES RELATED TO ALTERNATIVE CRISIS RESPONSE CALLS FOR SERVICE**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Public Safety Committee receive and file this report, inasmuch as the report is informational in nature and no Council action is required.

SUMMARY

On June 13, 2023, the City Council approved the Public Safety Committee report (C.F. 22-0978-S2) directing this Office, with assistance from the Personnel Department and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), to report on hiring, training practices, and policy protocols for Police Service Representatives (PSRs, i.e. 911 call-takers) related to unarmed crisis response calls for service. The Public Safety Committee report also requested information on procedural mapping and technology needed for implementing a “decision tree” that can guide call triaging for alternative crisis response and gather best practices from other municipalities.

This report addresses hiring innovations to reduce the vacancy rate of the PSR classification. It also includes a review of best practices utilized by public safety answering points (PSAPs) and diversion programs in a number of American cities.

BACKGROUND

The City’s Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP, i.e. 9-1-1 call center) is the critical point of contact and link between the public and alternative crisis responders. The City receives calls related to alternative response through the 9-1-1 call center, meaning that PSRs must successfully integrate call diversion protocols in order for an alternative crisis response program to operate successfully

Given the key role of PSRs in the alternative response program, the City must explore the staffing impact of expanding services. Currently, the City has a high vacancy rate for PSRs. Hiring, training, retention, and attrition are all equally critical for PSRs, who take up to two years to hire and train.

The Personnel Department and LAPD focus their efforts on both increasing the candidate pool for the PSR classification and also ensuring continuity within this specially trained civilian workforce.

To understand the scope of the issues concerning hiring for the PSR classification and to gather best practices from other municipalities, this Office conducted the following research:

- Interviews with experts from a number of PSAPs to understand training, policy creation and the impact of implementing unarmed and alternative crisis response programs, including:
 - Thurston County 911 in the Olympia, WA area
 - Bureau of Communications in Portland, OR
 - Division of Emergency Communications in San Francisco, CA
 - Integral Care and Emergency Communications Division in Austin, TX
 - Department of Public Safety, Denver 9-1-1 in Denver, CO
 - Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center in Minneapolis, MN
 - El Paso County 9-1-1 District in El Paso, TX
- Interviews and communication with practitioners from unarmed and alternative crisis response programs in several U.S. cities to better understand the process of incorporating PSAPs into unarmed and alternative crisis response programs:
 - Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) in Eugene, OR
 - Denver Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) in Denver, CO
 - Mediation Response Unit (MRU) in Dayton, OH
 - Albuquerque Community Safety Department (ACS) in Albuquerque, NM
 - Community Crisis Response (CCR) in Long Beach, CA
 - Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD) in New York, NY
- Consultation with the Personnel Department's Public Safety Division and LAPD's Civilian Employment Section to obtain statistical information and understand challenges in the hiring process.
- Review of academic research concerning organizational hiring, retention and attrition, and evidence-based practices impacting PSRs.

Vacancy and Attrition in the PSAP

The International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) and the National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA) released the results of a survey conducted on the staffing levels of 9-1-1 call centers across the U.S from 2019 to 2022.¹ Data demonstrated that the average vacancy rate at call centers nationwide was about 25%, which closely resembles LAPD's PSR vacancy rate of 23% (144 vacancies out of 637 position authorities as of March 2024). The results of the survey illustrate that high attrition rates are not uncommon among public safety telecommunicators and reasons for turnover in 9-1-1 call centers nationwide include:

- Work-related stress;
- A demanding and non-traditional work schedule;

¹ International Academies of Emergency Dispatch. (2023). *America's 911 Workforce is in Crisis: Results of a Nationwide 911 Staffing Survey*. https://www.911.gov/assets/IAED_NASNA_Staffing-Survey-Report-2023.pdf

- Better opportunities in other organizations;
- Inadequate pay;
- Mandatory overtime;
- Changes in policies, procedures or protocols that tax the cognitive resources of employees;
- Changes in technology to replace antiquated or add new systems requiring employees to rapidly adapt to new technology;
- Leadership/management issues;
- Work cultures that increase employees' stress and contribute to greater attrition.

A May 30, 2023, Personnel Department report (C.F. 22-1140) documented an increased attrition rate within the PSR classification from FY 19/20 with 32 attritions to FY 22/23 with 62 attritions. From July 2022 to June 2023, LAPD's Communications Division lost 70 PSRs (see table below); in FY 22-23, 20 PSRs trainees (PSR I) were hired. In the current fiscal year up to March 2024, Communications Division has lost 43 PSRs for similar reasons listed in the table below.

PSR Attrition: July 2022 - June 2023	
<u>Number</u>	<u>Reason for Attrition</u>
39	Resignations, probation terminations, abandonment of positions and/or discharges
15	Retired from City Service
16	Moved to a different City Classification either within LAPD (not Communications Division) or to another City department

* Includes PSR Is, PSR IIs, PSR IIIs and Sr PSRs

Addressing Vacancy Issues

During this current fiscal year, the Personnel Department and LAPD implemented several changes to the hiring process that resulted in the addition of 54 PSR trainees, with an additional class expected to start in June 2024 with 15-20 candidates.

Attracting More Candidates and Easing Time to Hire

On November 14, 2022, the Personnel Department (C.F. 22-1140) reported that the number of applicants for the PSR classification had dropped from approximately 1,000 filers in FY 2017-18 to 300 in FY 2021-22.

In response to a motion (McOsker - C.F. 23-0255) adopted by the City Council, the Personnel Department and LAPD (1) increased their digital advertising on social media platforms, (2) boosted presence at public safety job fairs and LAPD internal events, (3) added the identifiable title of "911 Dispatcher" to the bulletin, (4) eliminated the typing test and (5) removed the Preliminary Background Application. These initiatives were specifically designed to increase awareness of the PSR classification and remove barriers faced by applicants. The PSR bulletin released on May 5, 2023, incorporated several of these changes leading to the submission of over 2,400 applications.

On September 27, 2023, and April 9, 2024, the Personnel Department (C.F. 23-0255) reported, with the assistance of the LAPD, the changes to the PSR hiring process that will reduce the time frame from forty-two weeks to twenty-nine weeks. These changes include:

- The use of a new job-related assessment (discussed below);
- The creation of shorter and more frequent filing periods;
- Increasing digital recruitment efforts including the creation of an informational website for PSR hiring (<https://www.joinlapd.com/psr>);
- Increased use of online recruiter websites to attract more potential candidates.

As of April 2024, pursuant to the City Council’s approval of recently negotiated MOUs, PSR IIs and PSR IIIs assigned to Communications Division are eligible for additional compensation based on years of aggregate service up to twenty-nine years; the bonus is intended to help retain employees. The previous structure (see table below) did not offer a bonus for employees with more than nine years of service. The new structure continues to offer a dispatch bonus to less tenured employees, but now also ensures that PSRs whose tenure exceeds nine years will be compensated for continued service in the 9-1-1 dispatch center.² This allows for the retention of more experienced PSRs, while also potentially attracting new hires and reducing the attrition rate within the Communications Division.

Previous Dispatch Bonus Structure		New Dispatch Bonus Structure	
<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>Compensation</u>	<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>Compensation</u>
5 years	5.5%	–	–
–	–	6 years	2.75%
7 years	8.25%	–	–
9 years	11%	–	–
–	–	10 years	5.5%
–	–	14 years	8.25%
–	–	18 years	11%
–	–	22 years	13.75%
–	–	26 years	16.5%
–	–	29 years	19.25%

² PSR's currently receiving the retention bonus based on the previous structure will continue to receive their existing bonus until the next premium level is met using the new structure.

Integrating Alternative Crisis Response Programs into the PSAP

As LAPD Communications Division works to reduce staff shortages, there is a concurrent imperative to advance alternative response initiatives. There are several efforts underway to strengthen the connection between PSRs and alternative response programs and streamline integration of new protocols necessitated by those programs. This section reviews initial learnings from the recent implementation of the UMCR pilot and best practices in other municipalities.

Impact of Diversion Protocols on the 9-1-1 System

The implementation of alternative and unarmed crisis response programs requires the creation of new policies and procedures to divert certain calls for service away from traditional responders and into the hands of alternative crisis responders. Several cities with operational alternative crisis response programs did not experience any noticeable impact on call volume due to the implementation of new diversion protocols. These cities noted that even as the public became more aware of new alternative crisis response programs, there was no significant influx of calls because callers were already accustomed to calling 9-1-1 for assistance. Instead, with new diversion protocols, the public would now receive an alternative to the traditional armed emergency response.

Integrating new policies and procedures requires careful planning, continuous training, and a period of learning for call-takers and dispatchers to integrate new protocols into current systems. Adding a new alternative response framework requires a coordinated and thoughtful approach that ensures buy-in from Police Services Representatives (PSRs) and reduces the impact on the City's 9-1-1 system.

Training Strategies for Alternative Crisis Response Related Calls

Several cities with alternative crisis response programs incorporate strategic phasing for new protocols that allow call-takers and dispatchers to acclimate to the new procedures, increase retention efforts for PSRs, and facilitate an environment of compliance that requires PSRs to retain and implement an array of policies, procedures, and standards in order to successfully triage calls. It is essential that PSRs receive training and support as new alternative crisis response programs are implemented and expanded. To ensure the successful integration of new policies and procedures into current practices, strategies could include:

- Prioritizing training for PSRs prior to the implementation or expansion of alternative crisis response programs;
- Continually reviewing protocols with call-takers and dispatchers to help with retention;
- Developing training curriculum that provides positive reinforcement for integrating new knowledge into current practices;
- Soliciting feedback from PSRs to help in making adjustments and improvements to policy and procedures.

Roll Call Training

Outside of traditional classroom-based training, roll call training provides another opportunity to facilitate integration of new policy and procedures for PSRs. During this time, a brief training

presentation is conducted on a variety of topics related to policy and procedures, as well as mental health and well-being.

Prior to the launch of the Unarmed Model of Crisis Response (UMCR) pilot, this office visited LAPD Communications Divisions' Valley and Metro Dispatch Centers and provided an overview of the program. This provided PSRs the opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns they had before the start of the pilot. In addition, this office returned to the dispatch centers seven weeks after UMCR launch to update PSRs on the progress of the program and obtain feedback. After the second visit to the 9-1-1 dispatch centers, there was a noticeable increase in calls received by the UMCR. This increase in calls could be attributed to PSRs having a space where they could clarify policy and procedures related to the diversion of calls and an opportunity to speak directly with UMCR representatives. As a result, this office is working with LAPD to increase the frequency with which UMCR representatives conduct roll call training.

Collaboration and Engagement

When interviewing other cities, it was expressed that when call-takers better understand the expertise behind alternative crisis response, they typically feel less hesitant to divert calls to alternative crisis responders. When the CAO led the roll call training for the UMCR at the Valley and Metro Dispatch Centers, this office invited the contracted unarmed crisis responders to introduce themselves, answer questions, and address any concerns expressed by PSRs. Connecting the PSRs and crisis responders in this way, particularly as a new pilot program is being implemented, has provided an opportunity to build rapport and increase understanding of the vital importance of both traditional and alternative crisis response.

This Office is continually working with LAPD to create additional opportunities for PSRs and crisis responders to engage with one another.

Decision Tree

Emergency call takers utilize department policies, their training and experience to decide on the best method for determining calls for diversion and those for traditional emergency responders.

This Office partnered with Harvard's Government Performance Lab to develop a decision tree for the Unarmed Model for Crisis Response pilot to streamline the process and aid PSRs in deciding when to divert calls (see Appendix A). This decision tree was not designed to replace existing departmental policies and procedures; it is intended to be supplementary, used in conjunction with training bulletins, and provide a visual representation of diversion decisions.

Technology in the PSAP

In addition to changes in policy and procedures, expanding alternative crisis response can also impact the technology in the City's 9-1-1 call center. PSRs rely on computer aided dispatch (CAD) systems to triage incoming calls, dispatch police services and update officers in the field. Implementation of new alternative crisis response diversion protocols requires the reevaluation of current systems and identification of innovative strategies that help PSRs successfully divert calls. The section below highlights best practices and opportunities from other municipalities.

Centralized Dispatch Systems

Currently, several departments in the City of Los Angeles use their own CAD systems including the LAPD and LAFD, alongside unarmed response pilot programs. Many of these systems are unable to communicate with or send information between each other. When an emergency or non-emergency call is received at the City's 9-1-1 call center and needs to be transferred to other internal departments, often the information must be recreated with each transfer and when the caller remains on the line during the transfer, they are interviewed multiple times. This includes calls for alternative crisis response received through 9-1-1 which are transferred to the non-emergency queue — significantly increasing call-wait times before callers can be connected to the appropriate unarmed response programs. These issues cause frustration for members of the community and increase call-wait times and response times.

Multiple systems allow for software to be tailored to the specific needs of a particular program, but it can cause delays in the sharing and transferring of information. Cities such as Denver, CO (Denver Star) and Eugene, OR (CAHOOTS) operate on centralized CAD systems that are capable of streamlining communication between traditional and alternative responders. The police, fire and alternative responders have access to the same CAD system and can immediately view and update the same incidents. This allows for critical information to be transferred to alternative crisis responders and assists them in offering essential services for individuals experiencing a crisis. Additionally, restrictions are in place to prevent unauthorized personnel from accessing sensitive information such as medical and criminal history.

Bridging the Gap in Communication and Transfer of Information

This office, working with LAPD's Emergency Command Control Communications System (ECCCS) Division, has developed strategies that utilize interim technologies to begin bridging gaps in communication and transfer of information between traditional and alternative crisis responders.

Currently, the City's UMCR pilot is utilizing a terminal with access to a version of LAPD's CAD system that allows the quick diversion of calls to the UMCR dispatch center and provides UMCR dispatchers access to essential information being captured by 9-1-1 call takers in real-time. UMCR dispatchers are also able to update the CAD system with information including case identification and disposition of the incident. This provides a limited two-way communication via the CAD system between traditional and alternative crisis response programs.

Standardized Protocols Embedded in the CAD System

Some municipalities have embedded standardized protocols into their CAD system that populate a series of questions and diversion protocols based on the information being reported by the caller that potentially helps call-takers process calls quicker and with greater efficiency. The El Paso County 911 District in Texas serves as the primary PSAP in the county and provides 9-1-1 services for over 41 local public safety agencies. It utilizes standardized protocols for medical and police dispatching that are integrated into their CAD systems. This allows call-takers to offer the same level of services to all callers regardless of their situation. Further, it reduces the burden on the call-taker to decide on a method for questioning and soliciting information.

In addition to timesaving/workload burden reduction, standardized protocols have been considered as a tool to reduce errors and provide clear instructions to 9-1-1 call-takers for handling calls. Research into high-profile incidents involving use of force has dissected 9-1-1 calls and observed that call-takers attempt to categorize situations into more criminal terms.³ This potentially causes situations to escalate and can influence responders. Standardized protocols can provide greater guidance for call-takers, as well as increase compliance with diversion protocols and lessen the burden on call-takers. Some critics of standardized protocols suggest that this process can limit call-takers and note the difficulty of encapsulating and simplifying the complex scenarios encountered by call-takers. Therefore, standardized protocols are typically used in medical and fire dispatching that are best triaged using a common formula of questions and standards of practice.

Alternative Crisis Response Call-triaging

The addition of alternative crisis response in the City of Los Angeles will require the implementation of long-term solutions for the infrastructure for the expansion of programs and services.

Several municipalities have effectuated alternative crisis response programs by embedding alternative crisis responders in the 9-1-1 call centers or developing a separate alternative crisis response call center. This section outlines some examples of such long-term solutions.

Crisis Call Diversion and Center Crisis Clinicians

The Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (EMCOT) in Austin, TX uses a crisis call diversion program that focuses on diverting non-emergent mental health related calls away from the Austin Police Department. This program was an expansion from the original model which now embeds Center Crisis Clinicians (C3) in the 9-1-1 call center. The C3 has three primary functions: call diversion, call consult and call de-escalation. Emergency call-takers transfer callers reporting mental health crises to C3s who attempt to triage the situation over the phone and, if necessary, are capable of dispatching EMCOT teams to the location. In addition, C3s provide on-site assistance and guidance to emergency call-takers who may be unsure on whether diversion is appropriate or have additional questions about mental health calls. The integration of C3s into the dispatch center offers call-takers an additional resource and the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the scope of work provided by alternative crisis responders. This partnership also strengthens the services being provided by the 9-1-1 response system.

Alternative Crisis Response Call Centers

In several municipalities, including Los Angeles, alternative crisis response calls are diverted through the 9-1-1 system. Other cities either have a dedicated alternative crisis response call center that triages and dispatches responders or callers are funneled through the 3-1-1 system. Examples include:

- The Mediation Response Unit (MRU) in Dayton, OH, has a dedicated call center that has been integrated into the City's emergency response system and is referred to as the "fourth

³ Gillooly, J. (2020). How 911 callers and call-takers impact police encounters with the public: The case of Henry Louis Gates Jr. arrest. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 19, 787-803.

arm” of 9-1-1 call triaging. Callers dialing 9-1-1 are connected directly to police, fire, medical and/or MRU services. Individuals transferred to MRU are identified as requiring alternative crisis response and speak directly with call-takers who are equipped with dispatching response teams. By extending the 9-1-1 system to include alternative response, the city sets a tone that these services are an integral component of public safety and community services.

- In Atlanta, GA, and Sacramento, CA, 3-1-1 call centers are the central point for callers requiring alternative crisis response. These call centers may not directly dispatch crisis response teams, but they are meant to shorten the waiting time that callers experience when being routed through the 9-1-1 call center and they alleviate the workload on the 9-1-1 system.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

There is no fiscal impact to the General Fund as this report is informational in nature.

Appendix A

Los Angeles Police Department 9-1-1 Triage for Diversion Programs

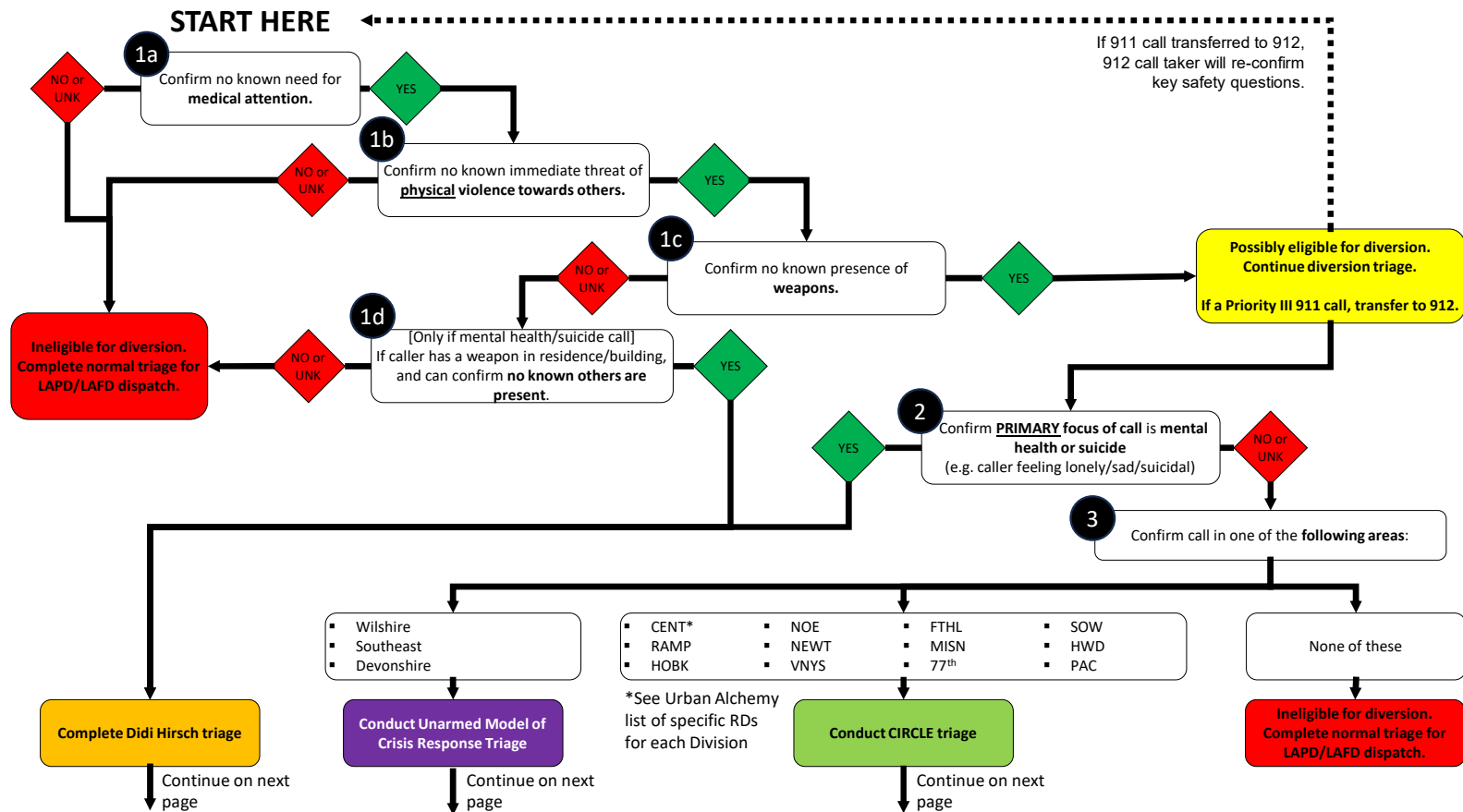
LAPD 911 Triage for Diversion Programs

Version 1.4

FOR ALL CALLS: Conduct normal call interview to determine nature of incident (Who? What? When? Where? How?)

If call is one of the following call codes, conduct the Diversion Triage below:

- Suicide Attempt (DH)
- Possible Suicide Attempt (DH)
- Mental Illness (DH + UMCR)
- Possible Mental Illness (DH + UMCR)
- Disturbance (UMCR)
- Intoxication (UMCR + CIRCLE)
- Wellbeing Check (UMCR + CIRCLE)
- Indecent Exposure (UMCR + CIRCLE)
- Loitering or trespassing (CIRCLE)
- Noise complaint (CIRCLE)
- Syringe disposal (CIRCLE)
- PEH (CIRCLE)



Appendix A

Los Angeles Police Department 9-1-1 Triage for Diversion Programs

