

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND
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Restoring Mental Evaluation Teams and Homeless Outreach Services Teams

For the last few decades, we have seen a significant increase in the levels of mental health crisis calls made to our first responders. In an effort to better respond to those in need living in our communities, Los Angeles County has made efforts to increase co-response teams to improve outcomes for our homeless and mentally ill populations. Most notably, the County’s Mental Evaluation Teams (MET) and Homeless Outreach Services Teams (HOST) have played a significant role in redefining crisis response throughout the region.

Since the inception of its first teams, the MET concept of co-response has grown into a 34-team configuration, operating around the clock. Our MET teams provide crisis assessment, intervention and targeted case management services. The goal of this co-response model is to reduce the number of incidents in which force is used, reduce the number of hospitalizations and avoid unnecessary incarcerations of severely mentally ill citizens. Despite the current circumstances, MET staff continue to deliver the same level of outstanding service, resulting in 98% of all calls handled by MET being diverted into treatment and away from jail.

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In 2017, HOST, as we know it today, was created embodying the values of the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative. HOST was the first of its kind in Los Angeles County where an outreach team from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority was embedded with deputy sheriffs to conduct outreach to those experiencing homelessness. To date, there has never been a use of force during any HOST contact.

Based on recent budget curtailments due to COVID-19, six MET positions and along with the entirety of the HOST program has been proposed for elimination. Reductions in these teams will undoubtedly have adverse impacts on community interactions, potential exacerbating concerns with the jail, mentally ill and homeless populations.

Due to changes in Sheriff Department programming in the field as a result of COVID-19, funds have been unspent for the County's Summer Crime Enforcement Program (SCEP), amounting to \$5.282M. This one-time funding can be reallocated within the Sheriff's 20/21 FY budget to fully restore HOST and MET, with a remaining balance to further mitigate budget shortfalls.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to work with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (Sheriff) to shift \$5,280,000 in SCEP funding within the Sheriff's budget to restore MET (\$1.548M) and HOST (\$2.338M) and utilize the remaining \$1.396M to further mitigate their budget deficit.

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