AGN. NO.

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND LINDSEY P. HORVATH

September 24, 2024

**Reducing Field Intervention Team Dispatch Times to Enhance LA County's Alternative Crisis Response System**

Los Angeles County (County) is at the forefront of alternative crisis response efforts. For too long, people experiencing a mental health crisis and their loved ones have only had one option: calling 9-1-1 and getting a response from law enforcement or paramedics. These responses can not only be ineffective but can also exacerbate the situation and lead to negative outcomes. For the past few years, LA County has been implementing various methods of alternative crisis response to provide alternatives to traditional law enforcement or paramedic responses. Through the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the County has created Field Intervention Teams (FIT) that consist of unarmed trained mental health professionals and peer support specialists who can respond in-person to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. These teams can be accessed by anyone in LA County by calling the LA County Help Line for Mental Health and Substance Use Services at 1-800-854-7771 or calling 9-8-8 from a phone with an LA County area code.

A variation of these FIT teams have existed in the County for years, but beginning in 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors (Board) has led an effort to greatly expand

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these teams to make them a true alternative to 9-1-1 emergency responses. When the Board passed their first motion on coordinating alternative crisis response in 2020, there were fewer than 30 teams for the entire County and they only operated during business hours. Because of the inadequate number of teams and operating hours, the average response time for these teams was over seven hours. The Board set out to expand alternative crisis response in an effort to increase both the number and availability of teams, and over the past three years great progress has been made.

The total number of FIT teams available has more than doubled, from under 30 in 2021 to 70 now. This effort was made possible amidst a shortage of mental health clinicians through various field based bonuses and innovative hiring processes by the Board and DMH. Additionally, in December 2023, DMH established 24/7 Countywide coverage, so anyone in LA County can access a crisis response team regardless of the time of day, location, and insurance status. This expansion effort has coincided with the launch of 9-8-8 in July 2022, as the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. In LA County, DMH has worked with our 9-8-8 call center, Didi Hirsch, to connect 9-8-8 to the DMH Help Line where FIT teams can be dispatched to callers who need an in-person response. LA County is one of the only jurisdictions in the nation to make this connection and extend 9-8-8 services to in-person alternative crisis response.

The September 2024 biannual report to the Board on alternative crisis response shows the dramatic change these efforts have made in enhancing crisis response. In the past year and a half alone, the average FIT response time has decreased by nearly 70% – going from over six hours in January 2023, to two hours in July 2024. This significant decrease comes at the same time that teams have been expanded to 24/7 and while calls

requiring dispatch have increased more than 37%. So even with the increase in calls, requests for services, and operating times, the average response times have been cut by more than two-thirds in a year and a half. This means that more people are receiving the help they need when they need it.

This success should undoubtedly be celebrated and applauded. But there is still more work to do. In order for FIT to be a true alternative to 9-1-1 emergency responses, the response times need to be comparable. While an average of two hours for response is vastly better than the previous average of over seven hours, it is still not good enough. The September 2024, report shows that the average response time of two hours for FIT arrival includes an average response time of 52.8 minutes for FIT dispatch. This means that on average, it takes 52.8 minutes from the time that a call is placed requesting a response to the time that a team is identified and dispatched to the client's location. This time to dispatch represents an important opportunity to decrease the overall response time for FIT in LA County. If DMH can successfully reduce the time to dispatch to under 20 minutes, then the average time to arrival for FITs across the County would come close to one hour, making them viable alternatives to traditional emergency responses.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors Direct the Director of the Department of Mental Health to report back in 60 days with the following:

1. A description of the dispatch process for Field Intervention Teams (FIT). This description should include a step-by-step breakdown of what happens between someone calling the Help Line or 9-8-8 to request a FIT and the moment that a FIT begins driving to the client's location;

2. An analysis of parts of the FIT dispatch process that can be shortened or expedited; and
3. A short-term and long-term plan to reduce the average FIT dispatch time to less than 20 minutes.

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