Emergency Community Services

24th September 2020

Introduction

Emergency Community Services is a proposed first responder agency for Greenville County, South Carolina. It has been found time and time again that our society has pushed our law enforcement officers (LEOs) to do so much more than just enforce laws, which puts unnecessary stress onto them. The effects of this stress can be seen through responses to mental health crises, domestic disputes, and nearly every non-criminal and/or nonviolent emergencies. Our society is comparable to a net, with LEOs existing as one node on that net. We put the equivalence of a bolder onto that one node, which needs to be broken down and redistributed to take that stress off of law enforcement.

This proposal is not intended to be an “attack” on law enforcement in any way whatsoever. It is the opposite, in fact, in that it is an attempt to help take the stress we have put on them off. All of the words hereinafter contain a great deal of respect for LEOs and seek to help them.

Overview

1. What is ECS?
2. The Need for ECS in Greenville
3. Shortcomings of CCRI
4. Funding
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What is ECS?

The mission of Emergency Community Services is to provide community based support to improve safety and reduce crime while taking stress off of our law enforcement officers.

Emergency Community Services is a new first responder agency proposed to work in place of LEOs for emergencies that do not need law enforcement presence. The main areas which ECS would handle would be:

1. Mental Health Crises/Behavioral Calls
2. Domestic Disputes
3. Substance Abuse

The Need for ECS

The former Dallas Police Chief, David Brown, said “Every societal failure, we put it on the cops to solve ... Not enough mental health funding, let the cop handle it. Not enough drug addiction funding, let's give it to the cops. Here in Dallas we have a loose dog problem. Let's have the cops chase loose dogs. Schools fail, give it to the cops. 70 percent of the African-American community is being raised by single women, let's give it to the cops to solve as well. That's too much to ask. Policing was never meant to solve all those problems. I just ask other parts of our democracy along with the free press to help us.”

This speech is a microcosm of the stress on LEOs. Ask yourself this: what is the purpose of law enforcement? The only acceptable answer is to enforce laws, mainly those of a violent nature. This is what they were created to do and what they are trained to do, and to expand their responsibilities to mental health, family counseling, and everything else does not work.

A study done by the Treatment Advocacy Center found that when police come into contact with individuals with mental health disorders - 10% of their interactions - are 16 times more likely to not just be shot but killed.
Citizens with mental disorders make up 1 in 4 of all fatal police encounters, 1 in 5 of all jail in prison inmates, and 1 in 10 of all LEO responses (Fuller, Lamb, Biasotti, Snook, 2015).

In 2019 in South Carolina there was 16.6 suicides per 100,000 people (compared to 14.5 nationally), leaving us ranked 25th in the nation. In general our suicide rate has been on the rise (AmericasHealthRankings.org):

![Suicide Rate Graph](image)

One of the biggest issues South Carolina faces is that of our domestic violence. A February 2019 article in AP News explains that SC is the “nation’s sixth-worst state.” While it does show an improvement - from being in last place - it is still awful. In 2015 the National Domestic Violence Hotline conducted a study among abused women and police. In the study they found:

- 4 in 5 who had not called the police were “somewhat or extremely afraid” to call the police in the future (70% thought it would make things worse, 59% did not think the police would believe them, 45% wanted to protect the offender in some way, and 17% believed the police would be violent to them or threaten to or actually arrest them)
- 1 in 4 who had not talked to the police would not call them, and 1 in 2 were unsure if they would
- 1 in 3 victims felt less safe after calling the police
- 2 in 3 who had called the police were somewhat or extremely afraid to call again (80% thought nothing would happen, 51% thought it would only get worse)
- 1 in 4 women had been arrested or threatened with arrest when reporting partner abuse of sexual abuse to police
- Only 1 in 7 (14%) of women were extremely likely to call in the future - the rest would not or were unsure if they would call (Logan, Valente, 2015).

And the sad fact is that these beliefs are not without reason. The National Center for Women and Policing conducted an analysis of studies in regards to police domestic violence rates. Police have a domestic violence rate of 40% compared to the national average of 10%. Several factors have been proposed that attribute to this statistic:

- The stress we put onto police while simultaneously making them bottle it up is not something that any person is made to handle
- The training of police officers rewires their brain and increases violent responses
- Because police are the respondents to domestic violence, families would not be trusting of the police to protect them
- The culture of policing creates an environment where it is tolerated and normalized
- The personality type of police officers are more prone to violent outbursts
While the final two are difficult to prove or disprove, the others have significant merit. However as this proposal is focused on introducing a new response unit we will not focus on the effects of training, although it deserves significant discussion in the future.

One of the main goals of ECS is to take much of the pressure that likely attributes to these factors off of the officers. In addition if we change the people who respond to these calls then there is a significant increase of trust from the victims who are married to officers. This then could be yet another step towards weeding out the irresponsible and “bad-apple” officers.

In addition to these the benefits of ECS on a local level are deserving of consideration. Greenville has a lack of psychiatrists which is difficult to combat. However if ECS was to pay our responders (who would likely be psychiatrists, trained therapists, etc) a competitive salary we would increase the influx of mental health professionals. This, combined with things like the reduction of crime, improvement of community support, and the families of the mental health professionals moving in we would likely see an increase in our already high growth. We would provide members of our community with jobs, and could provide a starting point for people who need some sort of workforce breakout.

By intervening before a crime is committed (often the crime of mentally ill people is not what prompts the call, but how they respond to the officer) we would keep a significant number of people out of jails, prisons, and the criminal justice system. We would save tax dollars on incarceration, free up court dates for violent criminals, and save money on public defenders to be able to allow them to focus where they are needed most.
Shortcomings of CCRI

It is true that the South Carolina Department of Mental Health has a “Community Crisis Response & Intervention” team, it is not without downfalls.

1. It is a state funded program and when cuts need to be made mental health is often one of the first to go
2. It often requires a police officer to already respond which usually escalate the emergency
3. They have a goal of responding in 60 minutes, despite the quickness it can take to end your own life
4. The severe lack of mental health crisis lines in our state

The fault of these issues does not belong to the DMH or CCRI. However they cannot be overlooked. Mental Health America of Greenville County handles many CCRI calls and operates a suicide call line in SC. However in just a few years SC has gone from 4 crisis call lines/centers to just 1. There is a need to protect these institutions as well as provide better support that our community can consistently rely on.

Examples of Similar Programs

In San Francisco they implemented a “Street Crisis Response Team” aimed to respond to 911/311 calls in regards to mental health/substance abuse emergencies. The program was funded with only $4 million.

Lane County Oregon has had a program called CAHOOTS, in which each team member gets 500 hours of training but has no weapons nor legal authority (Sarah, Kara, 2020). According to White Bird Clinic, who is the main partener with CAHOOTS reports that the total budget is only $2.1 million annually compared to Eugene and Springfeild’s total police budget of $90 million. The overall effects of CAHOOTS, from money saved to people saved, have been astounding since its introduction in 1989. See below for further reading on CAHOOTS and other examples of similar programs.
Funding

In Greenville County’s FY 2020 budget, a total of $51 million is allocated to the sheriff’s office, and Greenville City Police receive $21 million in the FY 2019-2020 budget. ECS would handle both community safety as well as community development, which is Greenville County’s top funded area with $64 million. Public Safety has a total of $38 million allocated for it. By the very most liberal of estimates ECS might require $8-$10 million. The funding could come from a diverse selection of sources to avoid cutting any one area by an extreme amount. Even just 20% of the public safety (the largest point of ECS) budget we could fund it. It is not impossible, and lots of examples show it would save money overall.
Conclusions

It is irrefutable that some sort of a change is necessary in our community. Time and time again we have attempted by changing police training, new units, etc. but time and time again it has shown to not work. Because they are not made to respond to these calls. The first step towards repairing the community trust in police is to improve the system they operate in, and ECS is an excellent method for that. And there is a large amount of community support, a petition in support of ECS has already garnered over 500 signatures and continues to grow.

The examples from across the nation continually show that a program like this would be huge for our community safety as well as saving money. We also have the means to fund it. Greenville County needs Emergency Community Services.
Sources and Further Readings


