

UNDERSTANDING TRAVIS' LAW

If your loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, they should be able to get the most appropriate response no matter what number is called, including 911. Prior to Travis' Law, families had to know the special number of their county mental health crisis response team in order for their loved ones to receive a mental health crisis response.

What is Travis' Law?

Travis' Law was passed as part of the 2021 legislative session.

Minnesota Statutes 2020, section 403.03, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1.

Emergency response services.

(a) Services available through a 911 system must include police, firefighting, and emergency medical and ambulance services. Other emergency and civil defense services may be incorporated into the 911 system at the discretion of the public agency operating the public safety answering point.

(b) In addition to ensuring an appropriate response under paragraph (a), the 911 system ~~may~~ shall include a referral to mental health crisis teams, where available.

What is required under Travis' Law?

Travis' Law requires 911 dispatchers to deflect mental health crisis calls directly to mental health crisis teams. Previously, families had to know the separate phone numbers for these teams in order to access these services.

If you call 911 during a mental health crisis, specifically request mental health crisis responders:

- Say "Send mental health crisis responders, don't send police. There are no safety concerns."
- Even if there is a safety concern, request a co-response.

What are the requirements for mental health crisis teams?

Minnesota state government funds a system of county-based mobile mental health crisis teams. Under MN Statute 256B.0624, this service must be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide crisis screenings, crisis assessments, and crisis intervention services.

Teams must consist of two mental health professionals or one mental health professional and one mental health practitioner and be capable of leading a crisis response in the community.

Under MN Statute 245.462, mental health professionals include psychologists, licensed clinical social workers (LICSW), and psychiatric nurses. Mental health practitioners have completed at least 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours in behavioral sciences or related fields and have at least 2000 hours of supervised experience in the delivery of services to adults or children. Mental health practitioners must be supervised by mental health professionals.

What does "where available" mean?

Mental Health Crisis Intervention teams currently serve in every county and are specifically trained to be the primary responders to these calls.

The "where available" language is meant to allow for certain contingencies related to geography and staffing issues. However, such contingencies should be rare and not the norm.

What about 988?

988 is the replacement phone number for the national suicide prevention line. People who call this line will be routed to their local 911 call center. As outlined above, be sure to ask for a mental health crisis team response.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERMINOLOGY

Since 1988, state law requires every county in Minnesota to operate a mobile mental health crisis response team. Under Travis' Law, 911 call centers are supposed to dispatch these teams as the *primary responders* to mental health crisis calls.

Primary responders are the first responders on the scene and direct what will happen. In the case of mental health crises, they assess the needs of the person in crisis and can start treatment on the scene or determine if the person should be hospitalized. Once the immediate crisis is over, these teams can refer people to follow up services to stabilize them in the community and prevent future crises.

What is a co-response?

There are situations where a person in crisis has a weapon or makes a threat. These situations are rare—less than 1% of mental health crises fall in this category. In those instances, law enforcement and mental health crisis responders can go together to the scene as co-responders. Once the situation has been stabilized by law enforcement, mental health crisis responders can take over the incident and get the person the help they need.

What are embedded social workers?

Although Travis' Law is the law in Minnesota, some law enforcement leaders have resisted implementing it. Instead, they came up with the model of embedding social workers within their departments or having them work under the direction of law enforcement. Under this model, law enforcement officers remain the primary responders for mental health crisis calls and the embedded social workers follow up with the person who experienced the crisis sometime later. Sometimes law enforcement even comes along on the follow up visits.

The problem with this model is that mental illness is still being treated as a criminal matter instead of a health matter, leaving people susceptible to arrest and prosecution. They are also being denied optimal care because police are not trained mental health crisis professionals or practitioners.

What about CAHOOTS?

When people talk about alternative responses to police, they sometimes mention CAHOOTS. CAHOOTS is a program out of Eugene, Oregon that provides outreach and services to homeless people. However, the outreach workers that are part of the CAHOOTS program do not meet the qualifications of MN Statute 245.462 because they are not mental health professionals or practitioners and are not qualified to provide onsite mental health responses to people in crisis. CAHOOTS and similar programs cannot provide a proper mental health crisis response.

What We Advocate

Law enforcement has an important role to play in our society when a crime has been committed. However, mental health crises are not crimes and people experiencing them are not criminals. As noted above, less than 1% of mental health crises involve a weapon or threat. The goal is to get people the help they need when they need it and to stabilize them in the community whenever possible. This goal can only be achieved when mental health professionals and practitioners are the primary responders.

Travis' Law directs 911 call centers to dispatch mental health crisis teams as the primary responders to most mental health crisis calls. We are working to make Travis' Law a reality across the state.

What else is needed?

Two things are needed to ensure people experiencing mental health crises get the most appropriate response. First, the teams must be adequately funded so they have the capacity to respond to the volume of calls, which has increased greatly since the COVID pandemic and has remained high. Second, the community must demand that these teams are dispatched as the primary responders. Since 911 is generally under the authority of county sheriffs, they have the power to decide how calls are dispatched. Insist that your county sheriff follows Travis' Law.