

# **POLICE OFFICER STANDARD AND TRAINING COUNCIL**



## **Guidance to Law Enforcement on Police Officer Collaboration with Social Workers**

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## **Section 1. Scope**

The scope of this document is to issue guidance and recommendations to law enforcement units on how police officers may collaborate with social workers. This guidance, in accordance with the provisions of [Public Act 23-104](#), is based on the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC) examination of programs and strategies used in the State or other jurisdictions through which police officers collaborate with social workers and the evaluation submitted to POSTC pursuant to Public Act 20-1.

## **Section 2. Purpose**

A collaborative effort between law enforcement agencies and social workers can provide an effective response to social issues. Studies show that a high percentage of calls for service in law enforcement are social service-related. Therefore, social workers can provide an additional tool for law enforcement to maintain public safety and provide immediate psychological support to individuals in need as well as appropriate follow up care.

Pursuant to Public Act No. 20-01 Section 18, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and each municipal police department completed an evaluation of the feasibility and potential impact of the use of social workers for the purpose of remotely responding to calls for assistance, responding in person to such calls or accompanying a police officer on calls where the experience and training of a social worker could provide assistance. The evaluation considered whether responses to certain calls and community interactions could be managed entirely by a social worker or benefit from the assistance of a social worker. Municipal police departments additionally considered whether the municipality that the police department serves would benefit from employing, contracting with or otherwise engaging social workers to assist the municipal police department. Municipal police departments could consider the use of mobile crisis teams or implementing a regional approach with other municipalities as part of any process to engage or further engage social workers to assist municipal police departments.

### **Section 3. Definitions**

For the purpose of this guidance document:

POSTC means Police Officer Standards and Training Council;

Law enforcement unit means any agency or department of this state or a subdivision or municipality thereof, or, if created and governed by a memorandum of agreement under section 47-65c, of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe or the Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut, whose primary functions include the enforcement of criminal or traffic laws, the preservation of public order, the protection of life and property, or the prevention, detection or investigation of crime;

Crisis Intervention Team means a partnership between law enforcement, mental health and addiction professionals, and community members to improve community response to mental health crisis;

Mobile Crisis Intervention Services for Youth means 24 hour crisis response teams available for in-home, school or community response to immediate crisis; and

Clinical social work means the application, by persons trained in social work, of established principles of psychosocial development, behavior, psychopathology, unconscious motivation, interpersonal relationships and environmental stress to the evaluation, assessment, diagnosis and treatment of biopsychosocial dysfunction, disability and impairment, including mental, emotional, behavioral, developmental and addictive disorders, of individuals, couples, families or groups. Clinical social work includes, but is not limited to, counseling, psychotherapy, behavior modification and mental health consultation.

### **Section 4: Procedure**

A review of the evaluation submitted pursuant to Public Act 20-1, revealed that the majority of municipal law enforcement agencies viewed the use of social workers as helpful, but not feasible based on cost. In assessing the feasibility and potential impact of the use of social workers on calls for service, four (4) general strategies for crisis response programs were identified, and are as follows:

1. **Police-based response model.** This model utilizes officers who have received specialized training to respond to crisis calls in an effort to de-escalate and stabilize the call. This

model allows agencies to train multiple officers to staff all shifts with minimal to no additional personnel costs and prepares officers to respond appropriately to mental health crisis calls for service. This model allows officers to act immediately by using applicable training in crisis calls, however it does not provide a higher level of care or connection to appropriate follow-up care that could be provided by social workers.

2. **Co-response model.** This model utilizes Police to respond to calls for persons in crisis with a mental health professional. This model allows social workers to become familiar with community and police procedures and allows social workers to conduct valuable follow-up with persons to reduce recidivism. Challenges to this model are the associated additional personnel costs to hire social workers and administrative burden of ensuring coverage for all shifts.
3. **Community-based alternative model.** Under this model, mental health care professionals respond to calls for service where it is deemed there is no immediate threat of violence and only request police presence if needed. This program releases police officers from responding to specific calls for service and may reduce stress for complainants that may result from police interaction. This model may put social workers in volatile situations without direct access to or communication with a law enforcement officer.
4. **Hybrid or blended model.** In this approach, the agency combines elements of the various models to meet the needs of the agency and community while leveraging existing resources. This model lends itself to a higher level of collaboration with third-party social worker agencies and reduced costs. This model provides a higher level of care than that which can be provided by police officers alone and allows for follow-up care by trained professionals, which leads to reduced recidivism. This model may have similar challenges as the co-response model in terms of the cost of hiring social workers and finding social workers to cover all shifts.

While no single model will fully address the needs of the community and agency, the above models are currently being used by agencies in Connecticut and other jurisdictions, and demonstrate that police agencies and social workers can collaborate to provide intervention. Each agency should further research and evaluate each model before implementing any plan, if any is decided to be used in their respective jurisdictions.

#### **References:**

[United Way 2-1-1](#)

[Crisis Intervention Team International](#)

[Connecticut Social Work and Law Enforcement Project](#)