**BACKGROUND**

The criminal system impacts people with disabilities in many ways, including too much contact with law enforcement, more victimization, more imprisonment and death penalty sentencing, and increased risk of harm in crisis response situations. For example, people with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may have difficulty understanding social cues and responding appropriately in stressful situations. Police officers may mistake behaviors associated with autism/IDD as aggression or ignoring the officers, leading to unnecessary use of force or arrest.

Annually, nearly a quarter of all fatal police shootings involved individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or displaying behaviors related to a disability, according to the Washington Post’s [Fatal Force Database](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2023/02/21/fatal-police-shootings-increase-2022/). For Black people with disabilities, the chances of having a fatal encounter with police during a crisis call are significantly higher, as Black people account for approximately [27 percent](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/report-black-people-are-still-killed-police-higher-rate-groups-rcna17169) of annual police shootings and killings despite being 13 percent of the general population.

Many communities are implementing model programs where mental health providers respond to mental health emergencies, sometimes in partnership with law enforcement. However, these programs are scarce, unavailable in many communities, and often understaffed.

**ISSUES**

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), Chair of the Senate Aging Committee, is expected to re-introduce three bills from the117th Congress, called the LEAD Initiative to connect people and police with the resources they need, reduce demands on police, and provide law enforcement with the knowledge and skills necessary in a crisis situation. First, the Safe Interactions Act provides grants to non-profit disability organizations to develop training programs that support safe interactions between law enforcement officers and people with disabilities. It would establish an advisory council, chaired by a person with a disability, to oversee the training program development and implementation. Second, the Human Services Emergency Logistics Program (HELP) Act would enhance state and regional 2-1-1 and 9-8-8 call systems, diverting some non-criminal emergency calls away from 9-1-1 and toward human services and mental health support agencies. Third, the Data on Interactions and Accountability for Law Enforcement with Individuals with Disabilities (DIALED) Act would improve transparency by developing data collection to get accurate information about how people with disabilities are affected by interactions with law enforcement, including use-of-force and fatal interactions. Together, these three bills will vastly improve interactions between people with disabilities and law enforcement personnel. They are expected to be reintroduced in May.

Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), introduced the 911 Community Crisis Responders Act of 2023 (H.R. 1423) to establish an unarmed mobile crisis response program under which nonviolent emergency calls are referred to unarmed professional service providers for response, instead of to a law enforcement agency. By providing funding for unarmed mobile crisis response programs that can serve as a first response to nonviolent emergency calls, we can enhance public safety, deliver better outcomes for community members, and reduce strain on the resources police departments expend on responding to these calls.

**WHAT SHOULD CONGRESS DO?**

* Pass the [911 Community Crisis Responders Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1423?s=1&r=2) of 2023 (H.R. 1423)
* Support the LEAD Initiative bills when introduced by Sen. Casey (D-PA) to provide grants for training, to improve call systems, and collect better data.
* Fully fund a community crisis response, including 24/7 access to mobile crisis units staffed with clinical and peer professionals trained in trauma informed care.
* Fully fund community respite centers that are available 24/7 to all who need the service and ensure that all services are fully accessible and accommodate people with different communication needs, including people who are deaf, blind, or non-speaking.