

To whom it may concern:

I am writing about the state's proposed legislation on police accountability.

I am a Registered Nurse with a clinical background in mental health nursing and i have worked in an inpatient psych unit. I have familiarity with individuals who escalate into violence, are impaired due to substances, and/or whose mental health issue distorts their judgement and boundaries.

I am terribly concerned about the possibility of substituting (in some cases) social workers for police. In the hospital setting, it is generally a group of people who will work towards calming or controlling disruptive behavior with hopefully the least amount of restriction or force. In an institution, of course, there are the resources.

On the other hand, one individual, a social worker in the field, is being placed in challenging situation. I worry that individual's life will be at risk.

The training of social workers, are based in part, about establishing a relationship. In a crisis situation, this might not be possible. Most individuals who escalate or are impaired- lose their focus and cannot problem-solve or calm down.

How would the social worker defend himself or herself, if the escalation cannot be contained? And, if all of their effects to communicate do not work?

I recognize, the goal of this legislation, in part, is to use less force and that a clinically trained individual may achieve that goal.

I believe pairing a clinician and a police officer would be the best idea or having the police call the paramedics (if the person is intoxicated) may be a better course action versus arresting them. This approach may overwhelm ERs, but again, often medical interventions are needed in cases of intoxication from alcohol or drugs. Problem-solving and empathetic communication may help, but once, substances take over someone, drugs usually provide relieve until the disorientation or delirium resolves.

At the minimum. we need carefully constructed guidelines to support dispatchers, social workers, and law enforcement to figure out when to send a social worker or combination of personnel.

I also suggest that the most effective use of social workers, is placing them in programs or situations in which they can teach or counsel about how to prevent aggression, and promote conflict resolution earlier on versus when a crisis is happening.

Thank-you for your time.

Sincerely yours,
Elizabeth Ercolano RN MSN DNSc
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