Mental Health Justice Act

All too often, the police response to mental health emergencies ends in violence, use of a weapon, or other responses that heighten tensions between police and the public. Per the National Alliance on Mental Illness, "[b]etween 2015-2020, a quarter of all fatal police shootings involved someone with a mental illness." When individuals experiencing a mental health crisis are arrested, they are often charged with minor offenses and unnecessarily contribute to the overcrowding of our jails and prisons.

In response, communities are increasingly turning to alternative crisis response models, to send trained behavioral health specialists instead of law enforcement when appropriate. As of 2024, more than 100 municipalities had "committed to supporting people in need with non-police, unarmed emergency response teams." Community-driven alternative crisis response models are "more effective, efficient, and safer than the current standard that relies on law enforcement." However, a lack of sustainable funding for these models has been a primary barrier to the implementation and continuation of these programs.

The Mental Health Justice Act would help communities create or scale up alternative crisis models, reducing violence against individuals with mental health conditions, substance use disorder, and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, while improving the safety of our communities. The Mental Health Justice Act would:

- **Create grants:** Create a federal grant program for state, local, and Tribal governments to hire, train, and dispatch mental health professionals as first responders in place of police during mental health and substance use emergencies.
- **Fund:** Prioritize funding for communities with high rates of arrest and incarceration of people with behavioral health needs, and reward jurisdictions that successfully reduce incarceration rates and death rates for people with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities.
- **Train:** Fund the training of mental health first responders and dispatch centers in de-escalation techniques and developmentally appropriate interventions.
- **Report & monitor:** Require grant recipients to report to HHS on key program outcomes, and direct HHS and DOJ to study the long-term impact of these programs on diversion from arrest and incarceration.
- **Provide technical assistance & best practices:** Direct HHS and DOJ to assist jurisdictions with implementation of alternative crisis response programs and to publish best practices to assist local leaders with implementation.

In 2022, the House made historic progress by passing the Mental Health Justice Act with bipartisan support. Keeping Americans safe and supporting our loved ones and neighbors with disabilities is not a partisan issue. We can make our communities safer and more responsive to our mental health needs.