



The Mental Health Justice Act

Reps. Ayanna Pressley (MA-07), Katie Porter (CA-45), Tony Cárdenas (CA-29) and Mary Gay Scanlon (PA-05)

According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, 1 in 4 fatal police encounters ends the life of an individual with severe mental illness. At this rate, the risk of being killed is 16 times greater for individuals with untreated mental illness than for others approached or stopped by officers.

Those who are arrested are often charged with minor, nonviolent offenses, but as a result, our jail and prison systems are overcrowded with thousands of individuals who would be far better served by other community resources. The Mental Health Justice Act would address this by:

Creating a grant program to pay for hiring, training, salary, benefits and additional expenses for mental health provider first responder units.

- These mental health providers would act as a mental health emergency response team, deployed when 911 is called because someone is in a mental health crisis or related situation. Mental health providers would be the first on the scene to help the individual and could help them access appropriate community resources.

Providing expert advice through technical assistance from the Disability Rights Section of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice (DOJ) and from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

- States and localities would be able to apply for technical assistance from DOJ and SAMHSA if they choose to use their own funding for the program costs from another portion of the law enforcement budget if they choose to move funding around to create a program that falls under these guidelines.

Creating mental health first responder units will help reduce violence against individuals with mental illnesses and intellectual and developmental disabilities, while also improving the safety of our communities. Mental illness is not a crime, and it's time we stop treating it as one.

Supporting Organizations: Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Center for American Progress, NAACP, National Disability Rights Network, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, The Arc of the United States, Easterseals, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, Center for Public Representation, Justice in Aging, Council of Administrators of Special Education, CommunicationsFIRST, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Union for Reform Judaism (Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism), Disability Caucus of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, American Council of the Blind, Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Group Psychotherapy Association, National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, Psychotherapy Action Network Advocacy, Clinical Social Work Association, National Association for Rural Mental Health, Lakeshore Foundation, American Association on Health and Disability, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, Kennedy Forum, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, 2020 Mom, Trevor Project