

**The NAACP, Berkshire County Branch believes that change cannot wait. Our Communities of Color continue to experience trauma as a result of law-enforcement officers' (LEO) actions and the inaction of our elected leaders.**

Pittsfield lacks adequate, appropriate, racially and culturally responsive mental health services. And elected officials and providers have stated they recognize these gaps in care. Currently, access to crisis counseling and response is limited to an unknown crisis 1-800 number or the over-utilized emergency room at Berkshire Medical Center.

**It is irresponsible and dangerous to allow these circumstances to persist.**

The City of Pittsfield, its city council, state delegation, and Mayor have relied solely on the Pittsfield Police Department as the only answer to crisis response and public safety.

But they don't need to be. There are many alternative-to-LEO organizations responding to non-violent emergency calls every day in this country.

One of the best examples is in Eugene, Oregon with the CAHOOTS, standing for Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets. They are a mobile crisis intervention program staffed by White Bird Clinic personnel using City of Eugene vehicles. CAHOOTS provides support for EPD personnel by taking on many of the social service type calls for service, including crisis counseling. CAHOOTS personnel often provide initial contact and transport for people who are intoxicated, mentally ill, or disoriented, as well as transport for necessary non-emergency medical care. The CAHOOTS have been providing service for over thirty years.

Even closer to home municipalities like Boston and Lynn and our neighbors in Northampton and Amherst are heeding the call for equity by recently establishing independent, and alternative-to-LEO, response units, and new city departments.

Mobile crisis response teams serve our neighbors. Our current co-responder program in Pittsfield does not.

The NAACP, Berkshire County Branch asks that the elected officials of Pittsfield, including the City Council, State delegation, and Mayor;

1) support the ACES Bill (H. 2519)

2) ensure any state funding earmarked for crisis-response in Pittsfield is devoted to an independent (from the Pittsfield Police Department), peer and practitioner-led, mobile crisis unit

3) commit to a process of assessing current PPD functions, undertaken by those with lived experience that are representative of the diversity of Pittsfield; that said advisory commission will be tasked with researching non-violent crisis response best practices and models; and, authorized to recommend for adoption a new city department appropriate to the circumstances of Pittsfield.