



Legislation Text

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Calling on the Philadelphia Police Department and the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services to increase reliance on trained behavioral health providers when responding to 911 calls in order to properly identify when individuals are experiencing mental or emotional distress.

WHEREAS, On October 9, 2020, the Philadelphia Police Department announced a new initiative aimed at improving responses to 911 calls where individuals may be suffering from mental distress. As a part of the new initiative, trained mental health services providers were to be imbedded within 911 call centers with the task of identifying calls that involve individuals experiencing mental or emotional distress; and

WHEREAS, Despite this new initiative, on October 26, 2020, Philadelphia Police Officers shot and killed 27-year-old Walter Wallace after receiving a call for a man armed with a knife on the 6100 block of Locust Street. Wallace's father reports that Walter Wallace had suffered from mental health issues; and

WHEREAS, Video immediately emerged on social media showing Wallace clearly suffering from distress, being followed by his mother, and briefly walking in the direction of two police officers. Those officers fired several shots at Wallace, ending his life in front of his mother and neighbors on the street; and

WHEREAS, While a full investigation of the events surrounding Walter Wallace's death is still underway, it is apparent from the video and early witness accounts at the scene that the officers involved did not attempt to employ other non-lethal tactics, such as a taser, and that trained mental health service providers were not present; and

WHEREAS, According to a study conducted by the Treatment Advocacy Center's Office of Research and Public Affairs, about 10% of 911 calls received nationwide are in response to someone suffering from mental illness. An additional joint study conducted by Policy Research, Inc. and the National League of Cities, found having co-responders trained in behavioral health needs reduces the risk of potential for harmful and fatal police encounters for people in crisis; and

WHEREAS, Walter Wallace's death may have been prevented if those trained to respond to mental health crisis were present on the scene to assist the PPD in employing non-lethal de-escalation tactics; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the Philadelphia Police Department and the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services to increase reliance on trained behavioral health providers when responding to 911 calls in order to properly identify when individuals are experiencing mental or emotional distress.