

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

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Executive Director

April 25, 2014

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair, Subcommittee on the Constitution,
Civil Rights, & Human Rights
Senate Judiciary Committee
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), I am writing to you to express appreciation for chairing a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights to discuss law enforcement responses to Americans with developmental disabilities or mental illness.

NAPO is a coalition of police unions and associations from across the United States that serves to advance the interests of America's law enforcement through legislative and legal advocacy, political action, and education. Founded in 1978, NAPO now represents more than 1,000 police units and associations, 241,000 sworn law enforcement officers, and more than 100,000 citizens who share a common dedication to fair and effective crime control and law enforcement.

Public safety officers are routinely called upon to respond to situations that involve citizens with developmental disabilities or mental illness. It is vital that these officers receive the necessary training to appropriately identify and respond to these individuals. NAPO is a strong advocate for increasing training for public safety officers on how to respond to these citizens, which is critical for the safety of the officers involved and the individuals at the scene.

Moreover, individuals with mental illness are significantly overrepresented in our prison and jail populations. Providing public safety officers with training to assist those in crisis will help to ensure that these citizens receive the help they need as opposed to being placed in the criminal justice population.

Additionally, increased collaboration between mental health agencies and criminal justice agencies will yield public safety benefits. First responders are often ill-advised of those with serious mental health conditions when responding to calls to facilities that treat these individuals. Failure to properly identify such facilities for first responders leads to an increased risk of injury of both the first responder and the patient. It is imperative that public safety

officers be made aware of the potential to come into contact with a large group of individuals who may suffer from mental health conditions in order to appropriately respond and maintain public safety.

Law enforcement officers are called upon more frequently than ever to respond to individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities who are in crisis. Public safety officers must be provided necessary training to respond to these individuals. An investment in training will assist with keeping officers and the communities they serve safe.

Thank you for taking action on this important issue. NAPO stands ready to assist with any efforts necessary as you explore how Congress and the Executive Branch can help support the law enforcement community with responding to individuals with mental health conditions and developmental disabilities.

If you have any questions, or if we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me at: (703) 549-0775. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William J. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William J. Johnson
Executive Director