

Instructions:

Compose email to council@bellevuewa.gov with the subject line "Budget Public Hearing Comments, August 1st"

Use some of the talking points below to craft an email that encourages any combination of the following:

- Fund a community responder system instead of a co-responder system
- Increase funding & staffing for homelessness outreach
- Refuse to provide funding for School Resource Officers

GENERAL PUBLIC SAFETY COMMENTS

Sample opening text: We hope you will prioritize investments in Behavioral Health Services in the upcoming budget. Although Bellevue piloted a co-responder program for four months beginning in May of 2021 called CCAT, we/I would encourage the city to use funding to instead join a proposed interlocal agreement with RADAR cities to support a community-responder system. Additionally, supporting increased homelessness outreach services will help provide more tailored services to unhoused individuals and lead to better outcomes than what armed police officers are able or should be expected to provide.

We ask the Council to consider that public safety is more than just policing.

We encourage the City Council to fund alternate programs that do not use police officers to respond to non-criminal activity, in lieu of increasing funding to the police department. Funding alternative programs frees up officers to do what they do best - address and solve crimes.

Funding alternative responses protects our Black & Brown residents, who [are disproportionately likely](#) to both be arrested and have force used against them by BPD

COMMENTS TO OPPOSE CCAT

Having commissioned officers respond alongside mental health responders can often lead to duplicative work and redundancies that are not an efficient use of officer time.

Creating a new branch of first responders for crisis-related calls will free up police and fire to attend to crime-related and life-saving calls.

National organizations including SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), and CIT (Crisis Intervention Team - law enforcement training for behavioral health crises) are advocating for non-police response to behavioral health emergencies.

Operating as civilians, responders do not trigger negative responses in the way that police often do. They are welcomed in more homes and neighborhoods.

COMMENTS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY RESPONDERS

If Bellevue continues along its own path without dedicated community responder support, it is possible that the city will not be given prioritized access to a regional crisis response center. Instead, such a facility would likely give priority to those jurisdictions who are a part of a regional response solution.

Compassionate response by trauma informed members trained in crisis management, and behavioral health. Ideally would include peers.

With successes exhibited in other jurisdictions, a community responder system could lead to the following outcomes:

1. A reduction in the number of arrests that result during a 911 call (which diverts people from the criminal legal system)
2. A reduction in the number of individuals transported to the emergency department for behavioral health issues which could be addressed in the field or referred to more appropriate settings/organizations.
3. A reduction in the number of behavioral health calls traditionally responded to by police and fire.

The overwhelming majority of 911 calls involve mental health, substance use, neighbor disputes, nuisance complaints, and requests for wellness checks that require appropriately trained, unarmed behavioral health professionals. Both the police and policing reform advocates often assert that specialized service providers—such as social workers, medical professionals, and peer support counselors—are better equipped to handle such situations than armed officers.

As with other health crises, the vast majority of mental health emergencies do not require a police response. As one option, a community responder program could thrive as a component of the medical response of the fire department. Many cities are exploring this approach, which also has a potential funding source through Medicaid billing for “Crisis Response.”

COMMENTS TO SUPPORT INCREASED FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS OUTREACH

Bellevue’s Fire Cares program exhibits amazing successes through their ongoing outreach and case management support. These programs should be expanded and more comprehensively funded.

Bellevue and its residents are not immune from falling into homelessness. For our city of 150,000 residents to only have one homelessness outreach coordinator is not adequate for the need represented in the community. Please fund a dedicated team of outreach responders who are more resourced to address the homelessness crisis with the compassion and scale needed.

COMMENTS TO OPPOSE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Studies have repeatedly shown that School Resource Officers do not prevent mass shootings, and instead can be quite harmful for Black & Brown students.