

Governor Murphy Signs Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act

01/12/2024

Establishes Community Crisis Response Advisory Council and Crisis Response Pilot Program

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed into law [A-5326/S-4250](#) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zovquk/nrddit/rq3fe7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!NS4Dm4nx6l-MqKiqm89yFUe4m1OIDU9bZbpxZZyXN2emgqh4li-vFdC-pvwTq_gMW2N_KNfxEqWljrlUzAWDneNarrRc\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zovquk/nrddit/rq3fe7_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!NS4Dm4nx6l-MqKiqm89yFUe4m1OIDU9bZbpxZZyXN2emgqh4li-vFdC-pvwTq_gMW2N_KNfxEqWljrlUzAWDneNarrRc$)), also known as the Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act. The bill establishes a Community Crisis Response Advisory Council, along with a companion community crisis response pilot program, and appropriates \$12 million to support grant recipients from six eligible counties of the pilot program – Camden, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, and Passaic – in addition to supporting the implementation of the bill by the Department of Law and Public Safety (LPS). The bill is named for Najee Seabrooks, who was killed in Paterson in March 2023, and Andrew Washington, who was killed in Jersey City in August 2023. Both were shot by police during mental health crises.

“I am honored to sign the Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act to help those suffering from mental health crises,” **said Governor Murphy**. “In times of need, we want to do everything we can to protect those in crisis and get them timely help and health. I'd also like to recognize the grassroots organizations that have been on the ground doing this work for years. Their work was the inspiration for several of our programs and their collaboration has helped us reach this point in our efforts.”

“The Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act is one of several crisis response initiatives our Administration has enacted. This act, in coordination with other innovative responder models like the ARRIVE Together and 9-8-8 mobile response programs, will immensely contribute to the proper handling of cases involving those in mental distress and the safety of the law enforcement officers and mental health professionals who are there to serve them,” **Governor Murphy continued**.

“Under the leadership of Governor Murphy and with the strong support of the Legislature, New Jersey has made historic investments in supporting and expanding a multidisciplinary public safety infrastructure. This legislation will provide additional resources to support individuals and communities that may benefit most from additional community-led, trauma-informed services and resources,” **said Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin**. “As we have seen through the statewide implementation of the ARRIVE Together program and the work of our Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance (VIVA), we can support communities best when we employ and fund innovative strategies that are data-driven and that communities help shape. We look forward to working with our partners to continue to expand and enhance these life-saving services throughout the state.”

“Mental health is health, and it should be addressed with compassion and evidence-based public health strategies, rather than punishment,” **said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. “The Community Crisis Response Teams that this legislation supports serve a vitally important role in addressing the intertwined systems of public safety and public health through a racial equity lens. These teams can build trust and offer healing to New Jersey communities, by connecting people to treatment when needed, reducing the cycle of trauma.”

“Community crisis response to behavioral health incidents can help avoid escalation, and having professionals ready to respond to such incidents with resources and follow-up support can save lives,” **said Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. “I look forward to the work of the Advisory Council and its recommendations for best practices, while the pilot grant program will help shape community engagement and implementation. This will be another step forward in our ongoing work to reduce stigma and ensure people get the mental health care they need.”

“The Office of the Public Defender applauds the passage and signing of the Seabrooks-Washington Community Led Crisis Response Act, which creates opportunities for de-escalation and community engagement as alternatives to traditional policing methods. Community-led teams focus on prevention by addressing the root cause of a crisis

rather than simply reacting to it. By addressing underlying problems, we create safer and healthier communities," **said Jennifer Sellitti, Public Defender Designate.**

The Community Crisis Response Advisory Council will be comprised of 13 members, including the Attorney General, who will serve as the Chair; the Executive Director of the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance; the Department of Health's Deputy Commissioner of Public Health Services; the Assistant Commissioner of DOH's Division of HIV, STD and TB Services; the Department of Health's Director of Emergency Medical Services; and the Department of Community Affairs' Director of the Division of Fire Safety, or their respective designees. Additionally, seven public members will be appointed by the Governor, with two appointed upon the recommendation of the Senate President and the Assembly Speaker, respectively.

The pilot program will allow community-based organizations to operate community crisis response teams in the six eligible counties. Grants of up to \$2 million per municipality will be awarded to community crisis response teams that have been selected by LPS at the end of a request for proposal and competitive scoring period.

The Advisory Council will hold its first public meeting within 45 days of enactment and will be required to submit an annual report to the Governor and Legislature at the end of the pilot program illustrating the need, design, and effectiveness of community-based crisis intervention programs in our communities.

This pilot program aims to further strengthen New Jersey's continuum of crisis response. In parallel, the Department of Human Services will soon name awardees to provide mobile crisis outreach associated with 988 to respond to non-life threatening crises when deemed necessary. Trained counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by call, text, or chat to 988 for anyone experiencing thoughts of suicide, or a mental health or substance use crisis. Meanwhile, through LPS, the Alternative Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation (ARRIVE) Together co-responder program is now operational in all 21 New Jersey counties.

The prime sponsors for this bill are Senator James Beach and Assemblyman William Spearman. Other primary sponsors include Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

"There has been a large push in recent years to have mental health professionals respond to calls from people in crisis, rather than law enforcement or other emergency personnel who may unintentionally escalate the situation," **said Senator Beach.** "This law will allow municipalities to partner with community organizations to do just that. The response teams will be able to assist people experiencing behavioral health crisis, connect them to resources and follow up to be sure they are getting the help that they need."

"The Seabrook-Washington Community-Led Crisis Responses Act brings together law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, and community advocates to reduce and defuse the cycle of retribution following incidence of police violence in New Jersey communities. Creating the Community Crisis Response Advisory Council and piloting community crisis response teams will have both short-term and long-lasting benefits on our cities and towns throughout the state," **said Assemblyman Spearman.**

"As our understanding of mental health progresses, so must our approach to handling individuals facing mental health crises. Representation matters, therefore it matters who arrives at the scene of a crisis. The purpose of this legislation is to ensure proper emergency services are administered to residents in these eligible communities. Ultimately, empowering a community response team that can provide necessary services such as de-escalation and follow up support for individuals experiencing behavioral health crises. The establishment of the Community Crisis Response Advisory Council enables the collection of valuable information and data, furthering the development of effective response policies, programs, and practices aimed at not only minimizing harm but also proactively preventing it whenever possible," **said Assemblywoman Sumter.**

"In the wake of the tragic losses of Najee Seabrooks and Andrew Jerome Washington, the intent of this bill is to save lives and address racial disparities in policing. Community crisis response teams can prevent a situation from escalating into violence, by knowing how to address a person's mental health needs in times of crisis. Their adept understanding of addressing individuals' mental health needs will bridge a gap that has existed for far too long when responding to emergencies, steering us away from the path of violence towards a future where every life is valued and protected," **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.**

"In recent years, the State has acknowledged that when it comes to mental health and substance use calls, a police response can be both inappropriate and ineffective, increasing risk to the individual in need of help. What it has not acknowledged, until NOW, is the will, ability and self-determination of communities to be stewards of our own health and overall wellness. These community led crisis response teams center the dignity and humanity of all those that come across their path. These crisis response workers don't simply serve the community, they are OF the community, and their success is rooted in that deep connection and investment to its holistic health. There is simply no substitute for what these teams offer, and the signing of the 'Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act' into law is a collective win for advocates, directly impacted communities and people of conscience throughout this state. We want to extend our love and gratitude to the Seabrook and Washington family for their courage, sacrifice and support, and commend the Governor on the signing of this groundbreaking legislation," **said**

"The signing of this groundbreaking legislation represents a full circle moment as well as a reminder to all of what is possible when our collective vision meets an unyielding commitment to collective work. This bill was birthed from the indescribable pain and trauma experienced by families and communities across this state. These communities took their outrage, loss and grief and constructed a model of public health and public safety response that will not only save lives but honor the lives needlessly lost up until this point," **said Racquel Romans-Henry, Policy Director of Salvation and Social Justice.**

"Communities across New Jersey have successfully launched and piloted crisis response programs that limit unnecessary – and potentially harmful and racially biased interactions – between police and civilians. The legislation signed into law today will expand support for new and existing non-carceral community-led response teams that will save lives, reduce the risk of police violence, and invest in resources and services that best support community members, rather than tear lives apart. We applaud Governor Murphy, the sponsors of this bill, and the advocates and community members who lifted their voices to create a vision for a more just New Jersey," **said Sarah Fajardo, Policy Director, American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey.**

"Governor Phil Murphy's signing of the Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act, Bill S4250, is a pivotal stride in bolstering community-led crisis response teams. By legalizing the 'All hands on Deck' approach to crisis response, this bill leaves less room for failure. We wish this level of support was available to Najee, however we are heartened that this bill can prevent the next family/community from experiencing such a great loss. We express profound gratitude for this forward step, which contributes to an ecosystem of public safety centered on healing," **said the Paterson Healing Collective.**

"The Seabrooks family believes the Seabrooks-Washington Community Led Crisis Response Act is a great first step for the State to start solving the problem it created of preventable police violence in New Jersey. Every American, including those with mental health issues, deserves to be able to call 911 in an emergency without fear of violence from the very people they've called for help. Najee deserved help, not bullets," **said the family of Najee Seabrooks.** "It is clear from the statistics supporting the Act that police, despite their substantial financing and training, are not the appropriate responders to mental health crises. Our family looks forward to seeing the work of the Community Led Crisis Response Advisory Council in their search to find what kinds of alternatives work better for our communities, including the City of Paterson."

"Let us empower our neighbors to be the first line of support during times of crisis, reducing our reliance on the police and ensuring that those in need receive the care and understanding they deserve," **said Denise Davis, Aunt of Andrew Jerome Washington.**

"This is a profound day, and I am pleased that Governor Murphy will be signing Senate Bill 4250. I'm sure when implemented it will save numerous lives. My brother, Major Gulia Dale III's death was 'pre-vent-able.' On July 4, 2021, he lost his life while struggling with PTSD. I know he would be proud of me for speaking up for him. I miss my only brother so much and I am glad to have been a part of a process that could help protect those struggling with a mental health crisis," **said Valerie Dale-Cobbett, sister of Major Gulia Dale III, killed during a mental health crisis on July 4, 2021.**

"I am looking forward to a shift in New Jersey policing from warrior policing to protect and serve policing," **said Felicia Simmons of the Monmouth County chapter of the National Action Network on behalf of the family of Hasani Best killed in mental health crisis in August 2021.**

"The new Seabrooks-Washington Law is an important first step toward responses to crisis situations that will promote healing and provide solutions that will truly build community safety. This law acknowledges that the lives of Najee Seabrooks, Andrew Washington and countless others killed by police could have been saved if handled differently. Our state is moving in a desperately needed better direction," **said the New Jersey Violence Intervention and Prevention Coalition.**

"On behalf of Seeds & Berries, community-based social worker and member of NJVIP Coalition, Alia Berry is deeply moved by the passing of S4250. The death of Najee Seabrooks, Drew Washington and all those who have died by police violence while in mental health crisis, are not in vain. For the mobilizing and organizational power of the people to compel elected officials to vote to support this work is literally life saving. This effort also acknowledges and validates the pain in our hearts by ensuring we support those with mental health needs using systems that are trauma-informed. This is what "justice" looks like," **said Alia Berry, MSW, LSW, Founder and Executive Director of Seeds & Berries.**

"Police have many responsibilities on their shoulders," **said former Commissioner with the New Jersey Police Training Commission, and LEAP speaker Jiles Ship.** "This legislation will improve public safety by supporting cities to create community responder programs, which will dispatch trained experts to de-escalate low-risk 9-1-1 calls. These programs improve connections to community-based resources while allowing police to focus on serious crime."

"This bill is an answer to how differently people with mental challenges could actually be helped and how the lives of Najee Seabrooks, Andrew Washington, Bernard Placide Jr, Major Gulia Dale and Hasani Best could have been saved," **said Zayid Muhammad, lead organizer for the Newark Communities for Accountable Policing and its statewide arm, NJ Communities for Accountable Policing.** "It's also about a needed shift in police and institutional culture to be engaged and mutually supportive of the groundbreaking community-based Violence Intervention work happening in these cities as a start, work that is greatly appreciated around the country, but sadly gets devalued by local law enforcement and state institutions at the expense of people's lives."

"We are pleased that Governor Murphy is signing the Seabrooks-Washington Community Crisis Response Act into law in memory of two New Jerseyans recently killed by police during mental health crises. Through this new bill, Families in New Jersey's largest cities will soon be able receive compassionate treatment for their loved ones in distress instead of an armed response which - all too often - results in tragedy. We look forward to building upon this important step by establishing even more community-based safety resources that can protect the most vulnerable and save lives," **said Yannick Wood, Director of the Criminal Justice Reform Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.**

"No one feels the impacts of police violence, mental health crises and racial disparities more than those in communities where these incidents occur. Recognition of the brilliance that exists within communities, and meeting the moment with funding and training opportunities, is an important first step towards healing. The investments made in the Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act are critical steps towards holistic public safety solutions, and we thank the bill's Assembly and Senate sponsors as well as the Governor for prioritizing these solutions," **said Max Markham, Vice President for Policy & Community Engagement at the Center for Policing Equity.**

"We're excited to see NJ taking a step forward on community-led public safety. These programs have been demonstrated to work in our historically marginalized communities that have been subjected to the worst police abuse and police violence, addressing problems more funding for police never has. Such a clear data point for funding community over policing," **said Matt Dragon, State Committee Member of Our Revolution NJ.**

"Everyone's life is valuable, and everyone deserves care and protection, especially the most vulnerable among us. Having a mental health crisis or having substance use disorder doesn't make you any less deserving of patience and support. In those moments where individuals are most vulnerable to be harmed, they need community crisis teams to ensure they live to see another day," **said Zellie Thomas, Black Lives Matter Paterson.**

"I am excited to see lawmakers in New Jersey investing in and supporting the expansion of community responder programs in the state. This new legislation has the opportunity to create meaningful change in communities across New Jersey. Community responder programs have been shown to build community trust in our institutions and reduce strain on overworked emergency services while providing a high level of care. My hope is that new programs who take advantage of this opportunity will look to the likes of Salvation and Social Justice and other organizations who have already been doing the work to establish successful community-centered responses in their neighborhoods," **said Sarah Wurzburg, Deputy Division Director of Behavioral Health at The Council of State Governments Justice Center.**

"Today marks a pivotal moment for New Jersey and how we support residents during their greatest times of need. Funding new community-led alternative crisis response teams is a significant step towards a more compassionate and effective approach to public safety. This legislation demonstrates a commitment to empowering communities, fostering trust, and redefining how we respond to crises. Kudos to Governor Murphy, the bill sponsors, and the advocates who made the Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act possible," **said Marleina Ubel, Senior Policy Analyst, New Jersey Policy Perspective.**

"The Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act champions the critical role of community professionals, empowering them as respected frontline responders in times of crisis. The passage of this bill serves as a commitment to deliver lifesaving support that allows individuals to safely navigate mental health crises, leveraging the expertise of our community heroes. By signing S4250, Governor Murphy has helped transform a piece of legislation into a lifeline for countless individuals that prioritizes the welfare of all New Jerseyans," **said Jordan Costa, Senior Project Manager at Giffords Center for Violence Intervention.**

"With the Seabrooks-Washington Act, we stand firm in our commitment to nonviolence. This legislation echoes our mission as a nonviolent organization, empowering communities to intervene, prevent, and resolve conflicts peacefully. Together, we build a future where violence is replaced by understanding, compassion, and collective well-being," **said Pam Johnson, Anti-Violence Coalition of Hudson County.** "In the face of adversity, the Seabrooks-Washington Act emerges as a beacon of change. Grateful for a positive shift, this legislation is our collective response to historical trauma. Thanks to its vision, we channel our energy into violence intervention and prevention, fostering a future where justice and healing prevail."

"NCST has in essence been operating a community responder model since 2015 and supporting the start up of

other programs. We are thrilled that our organization will be able to apply for this funding to support our work," **said the Newark Community Street Team.**

"WE know the of historical tension that exists between black communities and the police. Those who live and work within these communities strongly believe that the best way to keep our communities safe is to limit the interactions between members of law enforcement and members of the community," **said Rev. Weldon M. McWilliams IV, PhD, Senior Pastor, Christ Temple Baptist Church, Paterson, NJ.** "The passing of this historic bill would allow the community to participate and invest in its own public safety, and stand in opposition to all the forces who have consistently invested in the destruction and the Black community. The cost to invest in this bill is substantially less than what it costs to incarcerate those persons in our communities who need support and services which offer alternatives to punitive actions. It is a win all the way around. I still contend that the answer to reduce violence and crime is to give those communities the resources to do so. Affluent communities are clear examples of this. The rates of crime and violence are low because the resources available to them are high. The Seabrooks-Washington Community Led Crisis Response Act is a resource that our community desperately needs!"

"Our faith community believes that one of our central responsibilities is 'to love our neighbor as ourselves.' This speaks not only to our responsibility to show love to those around us but also to the fact that neighbors can love their neighbors better than anyone else. When you are in the community and in relationship together, you can love those around you with greater precision and care than you would be able to if you were coming from outside of the community. This bill offers an opportunity for love to flow in a life-or-death situation. During a mental health emergency, there needs to be a lovingly calm response, instead of something punitive or corrective. This bill is a tangible step towards more love and literally more life," **said Rev. Timothy L. Adkins-Jones, Phd., Senior Pastor, Bethany Baptist Church, Newark, NJ.**

Governor Phil Murphy

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