



U.S. House Subcommittee on Health
1036A Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 28, 2022

Dear Honorable Chair Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Biggs, and Members of the Subcommittee:

As Councilmember of the City of Irvine, California, I write to ask that the Subcommittee recommend the House adopt the Mental Health Justice Act of 2021, introduced by U.S. Representative Katie Porter (CA-45). The bill would provide cities like Irvine much-needed support and funding to promote community service in policing and secure the dignity of people with disabilities.

The Mental Health Justice Act would authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) “to award grants...to hire, employ, train, and dispatch mental health professionals to respond in lieu of law enforcement” for people with disabilities.”¹ As such, along with its built-in accountability mechanisms, this program will empower cities to reduce incarceration rates for people with disabilities and end endemic discrimination occurring in the criminal justice system.²

The City of Irvine, which has grown to become a thriving community of 307,000 residents, would be a highly-qualified candidate for a program HHS authorizes through this landmark legislation. First, Irvine has repeatedly earned recognition as the #1 safest big city in America.³ Second, the Irvine Police Department currently responds to nearly 2,400 mental health related calls for service every year,⁴ and its Mental Health Unit has already begun to transition this work to clinicians and non-officer respondents.⁵ In addition, our City is already actively seeking partnerships through the Orange County Health Care Agency and Be Well OC, which recently garnered praise from Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.⁶

I respectfully submit this comment in the hope that the Committee will make a favorable recommendation of the Mental Health Justice Act of 2021. Please communicate with me any questions or concerns.

Cordially,

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¹ Congress.gov. "Text - H.R.1368 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Mental Health Justice Act of 2021." April 28, 2021. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1368/text>.

² For evidence of endemic discrimination, see “Mental Health: Policies and practices surrounding mental health.” Research Library, Prison Policy Initiative, accessed March 13, 2022. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental_health/

³ Samuel Stebbins and Evan Comen, “America’s Safest Cities,” 24/7 Wall St, *24/7 Wall Street*, January 15, 2020. <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2019/10/23/americas-safest-cities-3/11/>

⁴ “Be Well OC in Irvine.” Irvine Police Department, accessed March 24, 2022. <https://www.cityofirvine.org/irvine-police-department/be-well-irvine#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20that%20the,illness%20and%20those%20in%20crisis.>

⁵ “Mental Health Unit.” Irvine Police Department, accessed March 24, 2022. <https://www.cityofirvine.org/irvine-police-department/mental-health-unit#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20these%20dedicated,email%20outreach%40cityofirvine.org%20.>

⁶ “Secretary Xavier Becerra Visits Irvine to Discuss the Nation’s Mental Health Crisis.” Irvine Police Department. <https://www.cityofirvine.org/news-media/news-article/secretary-xavier-becerra-visits-irvine-discuss-nation%E2%80%99s-mental-health-crisis>

CC: U.S. Representative Katie Porter
Irvine City Council
Irvine City Manager
Irvine Chief of Police