

# DAILY FREEMAN

## Kingston's Mobile Mental Health Unit Gets 30 Requests in 20 Days



*Kingston officials, along with Mayor Steve Noble, second from left, and Kingston Fire Department Chief Chris Rea, third from left, stand in front of the new fire department ambulance, which is to be used for mental health calls. (City of Kingston photo provided)*

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KINGSTON, N.Y. – In the first 20 days of operation, Kingston's Mobile Mental Health Unit has been requested by 30 people needing help, according to Mayor Steve Noble.

Noble, [who helped launch the mobile unit on Feb. 6](#), said Wednesday that he was impressed by the start-up.

"We are excited about what our team has accomplished in these first few weeks as we get the Mobile Mental Health program off the ground," Noble said in response to an inquiry about the unit's progress. "Many of the calls would previously have involved law enforcement and, since issues the Mobile Mental Health team are responding to can be nuanced and more complex, the duration of these calls can be longer."

"By having a dedicated MMH response, we were able to free up law enforcement and first responders for other types of calls and emergencies," Noble added.

The Mobile Mental Health Unit operates Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. "The team has been requested 30 times – calls involving 23 adults and 7 juveniles," Noble reported. "Of the 30 times requested, the mental health clinician diverted 9 patients from being transported to (the hospital)."

The Mental Health Mobile Unit project — in conjunction with Ulster County and Access: Support for the Living — pairs a mental health specialist with a Kingston emergency medical technician, or EMT, to staff an ambulance and respond to mental health emergency calls with a “person-centric” response, the city said in a release.

Responding within Kingston city limits, the unit is the first of its kind in Upstate, an announcement about the launch said.

In addition, Ulster County 911 has a mental health dispatcher, Kingston Police Department dispatchers are trained to divert mental health calls, and the entire Kingston Fire Department is trained with an initial Crisis Intervention Training, officials have said.

This new endeavor is funded by a \$321,034 grant from the New York State Office of Homes and Community Renewal, which will pay for the salary of the mental health professional and offset the cost of equipment and expenses related to the ambulance. It will continue to be funded with American Rescue Plan Act funds, the announcement said.

In January, Dr. Michael Doyle, executive director and chief medical officer for HealthAlliance of the Hudson Valley, said that a date for the actual opening of the in-patient mental health unit at HealthAlliance Hospital on Mary’s Avenue “probably in the third or fourth” quarter of this year.

HealthAlliance of the Hudson Valley is the operator of HealthAlliance Hospital. Westchester Medical Center Health Network is the parent company.

Doyle said that the outpatient chemical dependency program will be part of a planned health village at the former Kingston Hospital on Broadway, which closed in December.

In May 2022, officials announced that — after a two-year fight over the elimination of mental health beds in Ulster County — WMCHHealth had agreed to return 20 inpatient beds to its HealthAlliance Mary’s Avenue campus.