



[Federal grant to expand local mental health co-response program \(candgnews.com\)](https://candgnews.com)

Federal grant to expand local mental health co-response program

BIRMINGHAM/BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — A new mental health program in Birmingham, Bloomfield Township and Auburn Hills recently got a financial boost.

On March 14, Rep. Haley Stevens announced that she had secured nearly \$18 million in federal funding for 10 community projects across Michigan's 11th District, including \$260,000 for the Birmingham, Bloomfield Township and Auburn Hills police departments' new Mental Health Co-Response program.

"I am thrilled to announce that so many community projects ranging from infrastructure, to funding for police departments to the construction of new public spaces for seniors and families to use in Michigan's 11th District will now be fully funded," Stevens said in a press release. "My staff and I have been working for months with mayors, township supervisors, local and statewide elected officials from both parties to determine the greatest needs in our communities. Every community project that was identified and submitted to the House Appropriations Committee was funded."

The funding projects were signed into law by President Joe Biden as part of a bipartisan government funding package.

"When we invest in our communities, they thrive, and this funding will impact countless lives throughout our district," Stevens said in a press release.

The Mental Health Co-Response program was the brainchild of Birmingham Police Chief Mark Clemence.

"I've always looked for a way to try and bring in a social work aspect to policing because, as first responders, the police are usually the first to deal with people in crisis who are in need," he said.

Some studies estimate that 10% of all police calls for service in the United States involve a person living with a serious mental illness. These calls involve an individual in a mental health crisis in need of immediate professional help aimed at preventing harm or injury to the individual in crisis or others.

"A lot of times these calls are to the same places, dealing with the same people over and over and over," explained Bloomfield Township Police Chief Phil Langmeyer. "So we were trying to figure out how we could handle this. Our officers can go to the scene and they can handle the

scene and make everything safe, but we can't solve the root cause of these mental health calls, so we are going to end up back there."

In discussions with the police chiefs in Bloomfield Township and Auburn Hills, Clemence suggested the departments team up on a joint mental health program — in conjunction with the Oakland County Health Network — which has now been up and running since October 2021 thanks to a \$75,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan.

The initial grant allowed the three communities to contract a social worker from the Oakland County Health Network, who splits her time between the three communities as a full-time social work clinician. If, on any call for service, an officer determines a social worker is needed, they now have the opportunity to fill out a "core form," or a mental health evaluation, that is forwarded to the social worker for follow-up.

"The three departments have come together to make sure that these calls are handled and that we're addressing the root causes with a social worker," said Langmeyer.

Before the mental health co-response program, Clemence said there was no mechanism in any of the departments' systems designed to track if a call for service involved a mental health component. Now, all the calls the social worker goes on — either as a co-responder with police officers or as a follow-up call — are tracked to determine how many incidents involve a mental health component.

"Obviously (with) COVID, we've seen people being cooped up in houses and everything, so we've seen a significant increase in our calls for service that have a mental health related issue to them," Clemence said. "Now we're doing a much better job of tracking just how many calls we are responding to that have a mental health related issue."

Officials said the federal funding will facilitate the hiring of an additional mental health clinician for the program — who will be contracted by the three participating agencies — and provide a vehicle and communication equipment to allow the clinician to move about freely among the three communities, to respond to crisis situations, and to follow up with families, hospitals and courts. The funding will also provide crisis intervention team training and mental health first aid training to all 150 sworn police officers in all three agencies.

"Crisis intervention training is a 40-hour course that each officer will have to go through and all it does is teach officers how to better communicate with, how to better deal with, and how to better understand people suffering from mental health crises when they respond to calls for service in the field. And it's my goal to get 100% of my officers trained in this type of skill set," Clemence said.

While many programs in the past have tried to bring social work and police work together, Clemence said they have been met with varying degrees of success and failure.

"(This) has been an absolutely outstanding program," he said.

“We are seeing more help for our residents,” Langmeyer added. “They are getting the help that they need, and we aren’t going back; I’m not going to say it’s every case, but we are now seeing fewer calls for service at certain places.”

The program has been so successful that other communities are looking at similar programs. “I know the Oakland County Sheriff’s Department, for example, is going to do exactly what we did. They’re going to bring on a clinician under the same type of program at their Rochester Hills substation, and also at their Pontiac substation, following the model that we’ve laid out,” Clemence noted.

The Oakland County Health Network provides mental health services for adults and children with serious mental illness, emotional disturbances and developmental disabilities. For more information, call the Oakland County Health Network’s non-crisis service line at (248) 464-6363.