

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment - BWC

From: Kristine Haugh
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2026 5:08 PM
To: Bob Nelson; Laura Capps; Joan Hartmann; Steve Lavagnino; Roy Lee
Cc: Elisabeth Zepeda; Eleanor Gartner; Chris Henson; Gina Fischer; Yesenia Cuevas; Wade Cowper; Toni Navarro; Tanja Heitman; sbcob; Maria Valencia; Evie Vesper
Subject: BWC Recommendation: Continuation of Co-Response Teams
Attachments: BWC Recommendation_Co-Response 2026.doc.pdf

Sent on Behalf of the Behavioral Wellness Commission of the County of Santa Barbara



County of Santa Barbara Behavioral Wellness Commission (BWC)

Department of Behavioral Wellness
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TEL: (805) 681-5220 FAX: (805) 681-5262

January 28, 2026

Distinguished Members of the Board of Supervisors for Santa Barbara County,

The Santa Barbara County Behavioral Wellness Commission strongly recommends the continuation of co-response teams composed of a sworn sheriff's deputy partnered with a licensed mental health clinician.

Both the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and Behavioral Wellness have made co-response presentations to the Behavioral Wellness Commission. Both presentations informed the commission as to the effectiveness of co-response teams. Co-Response teams have demonstrated significant value in responding to calls involving individuals experiencing mental health crisis, substance use disorders, or behavioral health emergencies.

Data Analysis by both Behavioral Wellness and the Sheriff's Dept. shows that most crisis calls—whether routed through 911 or the Behavioral Wellness Access Line—necessitate the engagement or backup of law enforcement personnel. Pairing law enforcement with clinical expertise allows for de-escalation, on-scene assessment and immediate linkages to appropriate services. This integrated approach reduces the likelihood of use of force, minimizes unnecessary arrests and emergency room transport, and increases the probability of voluntary treatment engagement. Deputies benefit by minimizing unnecessary arrests, while clinicians can operate safely alongside trained law enforcement professionals.

Since these programs were implemented here, Santa Barbara County families have become more comfortable calling for help in mental health emergencies knowing that Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained co-response teams would secure the scene, de-escalate the crisis, and that their ill loved ones would not end up in jail, injured or worse. Continued investment in co-response teams aligns with best practices in crisis intervention, promotes more humane and effective outcomes for individuals in crisis, and yields long-term cost savings by decreasing jail bookings, hospital admissions and repeat emergency responses. Continued investment will strengthen cross-system collaboration between public safety and behavioral health, improve community trust, and ensure a more appropriate, efficient and compassionate response to mental health-related calls for service.

We commissioners recognize the value of having crisis response tailored to a person's individual needs and circumstances, which is why we must continue to retain CIT training and co-response teams as well as Mobile Mental Health Crisis Benefit for less serious situations.

As always, we look forward to collaborating with you.

We thank the Board of Supervisors for hearing and understanding our concerns and for supporting these invaluable programs that provide outstanding services to our community.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

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E. Maria Valencia
Chair, 5th District Commissioner

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Evie Vesper
Vice Chair, 2nd District Commissioner

Cc: Antonette "Toni" Navarro, Director of Behavioral Wellness
Tanja Heitman, Assistant CEO, County of Santa Barbara
Bcc: BWC Commissioners

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Kristine Haugh

Web site:
<http://countyofsb.org/behavioral-wellness>