



**For Immediate Release**  
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**Coalition of Social Justice Organizations Sends Recommendations for Reducing Interactions Between Baltimore Police and Persons Experiencing Behavioral Health Crises**

Yesterday, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the ACLU of Maryland, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, and Disabilities Rights Maryland sent a letter to Baltimore's Mayor, Police Commissioner, State's Attorney and President of the Baltimore Behavioral Health System asking them to immediately implement recommendations made to city officials for reducing interactions between Baltimore Police Department (BPD) officers and persons experiencing behavioral health crises.

This letter comes in the aftermath of the July 1 police shooting of Baltimore resident Ricky Walker, Jr. that left him seriously injured. Mr. Walker's family members called 911 seeking assistance with addressing Mr. Walker's behavioral health crisis. The letter from the civil rights and civil liberties organizations urged city officials to speedily implement recommendations made by behavioral health experts in its 2019 report – Baltimore Public Behavioral Health System Gap Analysis – that would minimize interactions between police and persons experiencing behavioral health crises. Specifically, the letter calls on city officials to prevent future tragedies, such as the one involving Mr. Walker by:

1. Connecting Baltimore City's 9-1-1 call center and the BPD to and dispatching behavioral health system resources, including non-BPD mobile crisis response teams available 24/7 that can employ effective de-escalation strategies onsite and divert individuals in crisis from involvement with the BPD.
2. Implementing a fully-functional crisis response system, including non-BPD 24/7 mobile crisis teams, peer support services, walk-in crisis stabilization centers for individuals seeking immediate help, crisis respite beds and apartments for individuals with disabilities and their family members.
3. Ending the prosecution and the criminalization of Baltimoreans experiencing behavioral health crises. The criminalization of disability in Baltimore fills city's jails with people with disabilities, all too often Black residents of Baltimore with disabilities, every single day. A prison or a jail is no place to be for a person with a behavioral health disability, and yet is too often the destination after contact with the BPD.

4. Training all BPD officers on effective de-escalation strategies, including creating space, making use of physical barriers, and “waiting out” situations presenting an imminent risk of serious harm, as detailed in active BPD de-escalation policies, and these strategies must be consistently employed when police are asked to respond to people experiencing behavioral health crises.

Following the police shooting of Mr. Walker, LDF released a statement underscoring the need for city officials to reimagine public safety by creating systems in which social service agencies and community organizations address social challenges, such as interactions with persons experiencing behavioral health crises, without involving police.

Read the letter [here](#).

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

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