

# Baltimore Mediation Responder Proposal

*Baltimore Community Mediation Center + Law Enforcement Action Partnership*

## Summary

When a community member calls 911 about certain low-level issues, and the 911 call-taker determines that it does not involve weapons, the threat of violence, or urgent medical needs, the police dispatcher could send an in-person team of civilian “mediation responders” instead of a police response.

## Opportunity

While many 911 calls need an emergency armed police response, today, [a significant portion of civilian calls](#) to police are related to quality-of-life and other low-priority incidents that do not require an armed police response. Dispatching armed officers to calls where their presence is unnecessary takes police resources away from addressing serious crime. It can also lead to negative interactions between communities and officers, including police use of force and officer-involved shootings, particularly in communities of color.

In Baltimore, law enforcement has already recognized that making arrests for minor issues is counterproductive. However, there is no alternative for community members who want a trained responder to come help resolve an ongoing nonviolent dispute or other minor conflict.

Baltimore has taken an important step in forwarding 911 calls related to suicidal ideation to the BCRI Here2Help hotline, which can dispatch in-person civilian responders trained in mental health. We can build on this step by dispatching civilian responders to other low-level calls not related to mental health.

To improve outcomes for the community and reduce the need for police response, we propose that Baltimore establish a “Mediation Responder” model. This proposal follows the model currently being executed in Dayton, Ohio, with an estimated launch date in March 2022.

## Call Types

Mediation Responders could handle calls related to low-level, non-urgent issues that do not involve weapons, the threat of violence, or urgent medical needs. For example:

1. Neighbor disputes

2. Person persistently trespassing on resident's steps
3. Residents having trouble with their child
4. Loud music/party complaint/barking dog
5. Check wellbeing of neighbor/resident
6. Minor theft or property damage by a known suspect not requiring a police report
7. Landlord-tenant dispute
8. Person using drugs in alley/abandoned row home
9. Other calls identified by consulting with community members

These calls make up a [significant portion of Baltimore City Police Department calls for service](#), including call types such as Disorderly, Suspicious Person, Narcotics, Trespassing, Noise Complaint, Check Wellbeing, and Juvenile Disturbance.

## Agency

The program could either be housed within the Baltimore Community Mediation Center (BCMC) or directly within city government. BCMC has years of experience training community members in mediation skills to resolve disputes between everyone from domestic partners and neighbors to businesses and government agencies. BCMC also has deep experience working with the police department and other city stakeholders.

## Staff

Staff would include a director and several 2-person teams of responders. All staff would work full-time. Staff would be trained and compensated appropriately in order to attract and retain high-quality candidates and ensure outstanding service.

In order to best serve the community, responders should have roots and credibility in the community, mediation skill, and knowledge of solution-oriented services.

## Training

Training would be coordinated by the Baltimore Community Mediation Center, though many aspects of training would be led by local partners. In addition to mediation training, it would include everything from police radio communication to situational awareness and safe arrival on scene, de-escalation, medical first aid, mental health first aid, harm reduction, restorative justice, trauma-informed response, cultural competency, and responder wellness. Training would include ride-alongs with the BCRI responders, BPD, and other local partners.

Key community-based local partners could include:

1. Bmore Peers Offering Wellness Education and Resources (Bmore POWER): community members with lived experience with addiction trained to teach community members how to detect and reverse overdose, reduce dangerous drug use practices, and provide connections to services.
2. Safe Streets: people with lived experience with the criminal justice system trained to build relationships with individuals at high risk of violence to help change their path.

## Awareness

Responders would wear a recognizable uniform to build awareness in the community. Responders would create materials to clearly explain when to contact them and how to do so.

Community Associations, churches, and other neighborhood institutions would help raise awareness of the Community Responder phone number and role.

## Responsibilities

- Responders would receive dispatched calls and respond promptly and appropriately.
- Responders would fill in slow periods by conducting proactive outreach in priority areas, checking in with individuals whom they have frequently encountered, and speaking with residents and businesses.
- Responders would record notes on their actions, in order to show results to community members and identify patterns and community needs.
- Responders would visit with community associations and other stakeholders to gather feedback and improve the program.

## Funding

Seed funding would be necessary to develop a concrete implementation plan, hire and train a director, then hire and train the dispatcher and responders. Operational funding would be

necessary to maintain the program. ([Here is a very rough budget estimate](#), just to provide a starting point for budget conversations.)

#### More information

For more information on how communities across the country are implementing Community Responders, [see this report](#) by the Law Enforcement Action Partnership and the Center for American Progress. (Here is a [pdf version](#))

To share questions, concerns, or ideas about the program, reach out to Amos Irwin at [Amos@LawEnforcementAction.org](mailto:Amos@LawEnforcementAction.org).