



ALLEGHENY COUNTY
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Allegheny County One of Four Jurisdictions in Kennedy School Cohort
Participants Will Implement Alternative Responses to Nonviolent 9-1-1 Calls

PITTSBURGH – County Executive Rich Fitzgerald today announced that Allegheny County has been selected as one of four jurisdictions to participate in the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) 2022-2023 Alternative 9-1-1 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort. The initiative is designed to support leaders in implementing alternative responses to nonviolent 9-1-1 calls and will provide targeted technical assistance to the county.

“Thank you to the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab on selecting Allegheny County as one of its four jurisdictions for this cohort. We’re excited about the assistance from the GPL as we work to design a successful response pilot,” said Fitzgerald. “I’m especially grateful to Human Services Director Erin Dalton and Emergency Services Chief Matt Brown for their cooperative and collaborative work to date on this effort. Sending the best-suited responder to 9-1-1 calls will result in better outcomes and better care for all of our residents and ensures that behavioral health supports are provided to those in need.”

The Alternative 9-1-1 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort helps participants develop unarmed emergency response teams that reduce reliance on traditional law enforcement by connecting residents in need of mental and behavioral health services to the appropriate support. Through the Cohort, the GPL provides jurisdictions with technical assistance to accelerate and enhance the implementation of alternative 9-1-1 responses. This may include tracking 9-1-1 call volume, creating training curricula for response teams, designing 911 call decision trees, preparing community briefing materials, and assisting with procuring services from local providers.

“Our primary purpose at 9-1-1 Communications is to provide the very best help, in the shortest amount of time for every emergency call, every second of every day. This requires extensive training and expertise on the part of our Telecommunications Officers, as not every reported incident is always as it appears or is reported,” said Chief Matt Brown, Director of Emergency Services. “There are additional tools and training that we incorporate into making these very difficult decisions, in a very timely fashion, every day. Public safety is the goal, for the public and the first responders that we serve and work with every day. This collaboration is yet another opportunity to work well with our partner agencies in providing the best options to serve the public in times of an emergency.”

In September of 2020, the county’s departments of Human Services and Emergency Services co-convened a Crisis Response Stakeholder Group (CRSG). The group was comprised of over 30 stakeholders from across the crisis system including representatives from 9-1-1, law enforcement, municipal and county government, elected officials, foundations, provider agencies and community members. The group met regularly to map out the current crisis system and hear from a wide variety of stakeholders, including frontline staff and people in the community. They identified gaps and opportunities within the system and developed a set of [16 recommendations](#), published in February 2021, one of which was to explore strategies to provide a behavioral health response to 9-1-1 calls involving individuals in crisis. The county continues to move forward with recent and forthcoming solicitations related to crisis response efforts.

“Alternative response is one of the ways we are working to reduce unintended harms and avoidable incarceration for people with behavioral health needs, while also connecting them to follow-up care,” said Erin Dalton, Director of Human Services. “We will start small and learn from this pilot while continuing to grow and improve formal and informal services throughout our behavioral health system.”

The GPL selected the 2022-2023 cohort of four jurisdictions from a highly competitive applicant pool. In addition to Allegheny County, Chicago, IL; San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, CA; and Washington, DC will be participating.

Learn more about the GPL’s Alternative 911 Emergency Response work [here](#).

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About the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab

The [Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab \(GPL\)](#), based in the School’s Taubman Center for State and Local Government, supports state and local governments across the country in designing and implementing solutions to pressing social problems. The GPL has conducted more than 200 projects in 35 states, helping innovative state and local government leaders improve the results they achieve for their residents. An important part of the GPL’s research model involves capturing the insights, tools and practices that are gained through these hands-on projects and sharing them with government leaders across the country.

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