



MEDIA RELEASE

Civil Rights Groups Demand Action Following Baltimore Police Shooting of Ricky Walker, Jr.

Recommendations Include Fully Functional Crisis Response System, End to Prosecution of Baltimoreans Experiencing Behavioral Health Crises, Training in De-escalation Tactics

For immediate release: July 22, 2020

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BALTIMORE, MD – In an effort to put an end to tragic police shootings of residents with disabilities who are all too often Black Baltimoreans, especially after the shooting of Ricky Walker, Jr. by Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) officers, a coalition of civil rights groups are demanding immediate action from Baltimore City officials.

[The groups' letter](#), sent to the mayor, police chief, the CEO of Baltimore's behavioral health system, and the city's state's attorney, calls for immediate action: implementation of a fully-functional crisis response system connected to Baltimore City's 9-1-1 call center and BPD; an end to the prosecution and criminalization of Baltimoreans experiencing behavioral health crises; and training of BPD officers in effective de-escalation strategies.

The letter also was copied to the BPD Consent Decree monitoring team. Chief District Judge James Bredar reportedly intends to ask Baltimore City officials to address the shooting of Mr. Walker at a quarterly Consent Decree hearing this Thursday.

David Prater, Managing Attorney for Disability Rights Maryland, said: “This is, unfortunately, a predictable outcome when communities fail to invest in the full range of community based services for persons with disabilities. If we want to change the fact that persons with disabilities are disproportionately victims of police use of force incidents and disproportionately incarcerated, we need to change the responses we provide to people in crisis. If our responses change, so will the outcomes.”

In the publicly released 9-1-1 call and body worn camera video captured by responding officers, it appears that the family of Mr. Walker called 9-1-1 seeking help regarding him having a mental health crisis. The video shows Mr. Walker in the basement of the family’s home, with only one way in or out. Upon the BPD officers’ arrival, a family member leaves the basement and over the next 10 minutes police surround Mr. Walker and display handcuffs, apparently to take him into custody. The police presence clearly agitates Mr. Walker, who repeatedly says that officers are going to kill him. As the officers move closer, Mr. Walker eventually pulls out a gun and is shot by officers multiple times. As of the BPD’s July 9, 2020, press conference, Mr. Walker remained hospitalized with injuries from the shooting. During his hospitalization, Baltimore State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby announced criminal charges against Mr. Walker.

Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy for the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, said: “This tragic event exemplifies the need for robust alternatives to the police as a first-responder to behavioral health crisis calls. Baltimore’s 9-1-1 system must be able to dispatch non-law enforcement mobile crisis teams on calls responding to individuals in crisis. Baltimore must expand and enhance its behavioral health system, including its crisis response system but also longer-term supports such as housing services that can help prevent these calls in the first place. The Bazelon Center calls on Baltimore and all communities to consider a reduced role for the police and additional spending on these community-based measures that promote the well-being of all.”

Since 2017, our organizations have been involved with the implementation of the Consent Decree. Among other things, with community input in 2019, the parties to the Consent Decree conducted a “gaps analysis” of Baltimore’s behavioral health system, including recommendations for expanding and improving the system’s alternatives to unnecessary and inappropriate BPD interactions with residents experiencing behavioral health crises. Unfortunately, nearly all of these recommendations, which many of our organizations have endorsed, have not yet been implemented.

Monique Dixon, Deputy Director of Policy and Director of State Advocacy for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., said: “The police shooting of Mr. Walker underscores the need for city officials to invest in services for Baltimore residents who

experience behavioral health crises. The gap analysis report, which was required by the consent decree, provides a road map of the necessary services and structures that must be in place to avoid the involvement of police officers who are ill equipped to address behavioral health challenges.”

The groups demand that the following actions be taken *immediately*:

1. Baltimore City’s 9-1-1 call center and the BPD must be able to connect to and dispatch behavioral health system resources, including non-BPD mobile crisis response teams available 24/7, who can employ effective de-escalation strategies onsite and divert individuals in crisis from involvement with the BPD. Mobile response teams must be prepared to travel to crises taking place in any neighborhood in Baltimore, and to arrive on scene as quickly as BPD officers would.
2. Baltimore must implement a fully-functional crisis response system, including non-BPD 24/7 mobile crisis teams but also 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; and linkages to community-based services and supports, including housing services as needed.
3. The Baltimore City State’s Attorney and the BPD must end the prosecution and the criminalization of Baltimoreans experiencing behavioral health crises. The criminalization of disability in Baltimore fills Maryland’s jails and prisons 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. The BPD must train all of its 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. These strategies must be consistently employed when police are asked to respond to people experiencing behavioral health crises.

David Rocah, Senior Staff Attorney for the ACLU of Maryland, said: “To characterize as ‘de-escalation’ what Baltimore Police did in the situation that resulted in officers shooting Ricky Walker, Jr. reflects the incredibly low expectations that have become acceptable in how police will and can respond to people in mental distress. Until we recognize and address that failing, tragedies like this will inevitably recur even though there are better, more humane models that can and should be used by Baltimore City instead.”

Read the letter and learn more online: http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ltr-fr-ACLU-BazelonCenter-DRM-NAACP-RE-Walker-Shooting_7-20-2020- FINAL.pdf.

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