



For Immediate Release
Friday, May 30, 2025

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LDF and Bazelon Center Release Toolkits to Support Advocates to End Police Violence Against Black People with Disabilities

Today, in recognition of Mental Health Awareness month, the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) and [Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law](#) released two toolkits designed to aid advocates and legislators in advancing strategies to prevent police violence and achieve lasting change for Black people with disabilities: “[End Police Violence Against Black People With Disabilities With Community-Based Services](#)” and “[What States and Localities Must Do](#).”

Emergency response systems frequently rely primarily on law enforcement to respond to 911 calls involving people with mental health disabilities. These responses often fail to protect them and, in fact, cause more harm. The toolkits released today provide an overview and guidance for community-based services and strategies to address this problem, including:

- Ensuring that Emergency Call Centers include staff with mental health expertise who can handle mental health-related calls.
- Ensuring that where an in-person response is needed, Emergency Call Centers can dispatch mental health professionals or people with lived experience in the mental health system who are trained to provide peer support.
- Addressing the social determinants of health (e.g., helping people secure and maintain housing and find and maintain employment) to help prevent future mental health crises.
- Ensuring that, when law enforcement officers encounter people with mental health disabilities or who are experiencing a mental health crisis and need assistance, they arrange for a mobile mental health response to address immediate needs, refer the person to appropriate community-based resources, and arrange for transportation if needed.
- Collecting and analyzing data, adopting policies, and providing training to 911, 988, and police staff about when calls involving people with mental illness or who are experiencing a crisis can and should be handled entirely by the behavioral health system.

“All Black people, including those with mental health disabilities, should have access to services that will help them thrive,” said **Puneet Cheema, Manager of the Justice in Public Safety Project at LDF**.

“Until we prioritize investments into resources that prevent police violence, our public safety system will continue to fail Black people with disabilities and place them in danger. We urge states and localities to invest in interventions, programs, and resources that will meet the needs of people in crisis or with disabilities instead of criminalizing them.”

“The same way calls for physical health emergencies receive a response by trained healthcare professionals, calls for mental health help should receive a mental health response,” said **Jennifer Mathis, Deputy Director of the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law**. “Too often, sending the wrong response results in avoidable tragedy, particularly for Black people with disabilities. We call on communities to invest in the right types of responses to these calls and in the community-based mental health services needed to prevent mental health crises in the first place.”

The toolkits build on “Advancing An Alternative to Police: Community-Based Services for Black People with Mental Illness,” which can be accessed [here](#).

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Founded in 1940, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. 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 Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that 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.

Since 1972, the [Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law](#) has advocated for the civil rights, full inclusion and equality of adults and children with mental health disabilities. The Bazelon Center accomplishes its goals through a unique combination of litigation, public policy advocacy, coalition building and leadership, public education, media outreach and technical assistance—a comprehensive approach that ensures we achieve the greatest impact.