

## **CCIT-NYC Responds to Tragic Death of George Zapantis After NYPD Tasing**

**(New York, NY - 6/25/2020)– Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC (CCIT-NYC) issues the following statement in response to the tragic death of Queens resident George Zapantis:**

CCIT-NYC is appalled that another member of the mental health community was needlessly killed by the NYPD this week.

George Zapantis, age 29, was repeatedly tasered at his own home in Queens on Sunday, June 21 and is believed to have suffered a cardiac arrest shortly thereafter during an ambulance ride to New York-Presbyterian Queens, where he died.

The police were called to his home by a neighbor with a reported history of harassing Mr. Zapantis for his aberrant, but non-threatening, behavior.

This is precisely the type of crisis call that CCIT-NYC predicted when we testified before City Council earlier this month and submitted a detailed proposal urging the removal of police from these encounters.

The NYPD is the only entity in the City that is authorized to respond to mental health crises, and all too often, the result is injury or death at the hands of the police and not even remotely the hoped-for and much-needed crisis de-escalation and help.

The CCIT-NYC proposal would have mental health teams, consisting of an emergency medical technician and a trained “peer” with lived mental health experience, respond instead of the police.

In the last five years alone, 16 New Yorkers experiencing mental health crises – the majority of whom were Black or other persons of color -- died during police encounters. This is more than double the number killed in the preceding five years, even as the NYPD implemented specialized Crisis Intervention Training.

Police should not, and do not want to, respond to mental health crises.

The Mayor and the City Council must fund a mental health team response program in this year's budget to ensure no one else is needlessly killed by the NYPD.

**James Mutton, Director of NYC Operations at Concern for Independent Living**, says, “Concern for Independent Living has been deeply involved in the CCIT-NYC campaign since its inception.

We strongly believe that the time is right to pilot a peer-driven alternative model to respond to mental health crises, thereby avoiding harm and ensuring compassionate, well-balanced approaches that avoid unnecessary use of emergency departments and hospitals.”

**Cal Hedigan, Chief Executive Officer of Community Access**, says, “New York City must take swift action to end the senseless loss of life of people experiencing mental health crises. NYPD actions have shown over and over again that they cannot be the first responders to the over 200,000 crisis calls that are placed each year. We know that a peer-driven healthcare response is the answer. It is time that the city listens to the guidance from advocates and family members of those who have been killed or otherwise harmed in police encounters and removes NYPD from mental health crisis response.”

**Ruth Lowenkron, Director of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**, says, “Not another person injured. Not another person killed. New York City must put an immediate halt to police as first responders to those experiencing mental health crises. Someone experiencing a mental health crisis requires help from healthcare professionals, not paramilitary policing from law enforcement.”

**Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD, President & CEO of Fountain House** says, “This tragedy highlights, yet again, the ways in which law enforcement criminalizes mental illness and causes harm to our communities. Police should not be responding to people in crisis and should be replaced with special, peer-driven mental health teams that offer critical services and compassionate care. We join our colleagues at CCIT-NYC in calling on our local elected officials to address this tragedy and others like it by allocating funding this week in the NYC Budget to address this dangerous intersection of policing and mental illness. We can’t afford to wait any longer for action.”

**Matt Kudish, Executive Director of NAMI-NYC**, says, “NAMI-NYC is devastated to learn that, once again, a New Yorker having a mental health crisis was killed by the NYPD. We believe the only way to prevent tragedies like the death of George Zapantis is to immediately remove NYPD from mental health emergencies. City Council must pass a budget that redirects money from the NYPD and instead invests in community mental health response teams which do not include police officers.”

**About Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC ([www.ccitnyc.org](http://www.ccitnyc.org))**

Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC is a coalition of 80 organizations and over 400 stakeholders whose mission is to transform how the City responds to mental health crises by diverting crisis responses away from law enforcement. CCITNYC knows that mental health crises are not criminal justice matters, and they require a public health response that is led by healthcare professionals with the capacity to deliver person-centered interventions, along with peers with lived mental health experience.

**About Community Access ([www.communityaccess.org](http://www.communityaccess.org))**

Established in 1974, Community Access, one of the CCIT-NYC coalition's leaders, expands

opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy and healing-focused services.

**About Concern for Independent Living, Inc. ([www.concernhousing.org](http://www.concernhousing.org))**

Since 1972, Concern's mission has been to provide housing and services that enrich lives and strengthen communities. This is achieved by developing high-quality, attractive housing, together with the provision of services that help people thrive in the communities of their choice. We currently provide housing and services to 1,500 adults and 250 children in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and on Long Island, in a variety of residential settings, and have 500 additional units in various stages of development.

**Fountain House (<https://www.fountainhouse.org>)**

Fountain House is an internationally recognized nonprofit that supports the human dignity of people living with mental illness, using a pioneering restorative model to help them overcome social isolation and build the community and the resilience needed to thrive. It is the most widely replicated community-based model for people living with mental illness, with more than 300 affiliated programs in the US and in more than 30 countries.

**About National Alliance on Mental Illness of NYC ([www.naminycmetro.org](http://www.naminycmetro.org))**

NAMI-NYC helps families and individuals affected by mental illness build better lives through education, support, and advocacy.

**About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest ([www.nylpi.org](http://www.nylpi.org))**

For over 40 years, NYLPI has fought for New Yorkers with disabilities, including for an equitable criminal legal system. Recent successes include two suits mandating that the NYPD provide the public with footage from the body-worn cameras of police who shot and killed individuals experiencing mental health crises.

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