



Advocates Respond to the Killing of Walter Wallace, Jr., Demand Action in New York

(NEW YORK) - Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC (CCIT-NYC), a coalition of people living with mental health concerns, family members, non-profit social service providers, legal professionals and other concerned advocates and New Yorkers, sends our sympathies and well wishes to the family, and especially the children, of Walter Wallace, Jr.

The killing of Mr. Wallace is yet another painful reminder that police were never meant to be health care workers. Furthermore, our experience here in New York City show us that no amount of training will equip police officers to serve this function.

Since the NYPD began implementing Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) de-escalation training five years ago, 16 people who were experiencing mental health crises died in police encounters. This is more than twice the number of people experiencing mental health crises who were killed in police encounters in the seven years prior to 2015 when the training began. Most of those killed were Black and other people of color. It is past time to implement a mental health response for mental health crises.

Police officers are trained to enforce the law, while mental health workers are trained to connect with the individuals they work with. The difference here could not be clearer.

Mr. Wallace's family called for an ambulance to obtain help for their loved one – just like the families of Mohammed Bah, and so many others have done. We continue to name the individuals lost to police violence and call for action on their behalf:

Mario Ocasio, Age 51 – June 2015 - Bronx –tasered, batonned, pepper sprayed and killed

Rashaun Lloyd, Age 25 - June 2016 – Bronx – shot and killed

Deborah Danner, Age 66 - October 2016 – Bronx – shot and killed

Ariel Galarza, Age 49 - November 2016 - Bronx – tasered twice and killed – ruled a homicide

Dwayne Jeune, Age 32 - July 2017 - Brooklyn – tasered, shot, and killed

Andy Sookdeo, Age 29 - August 2017 – Brooklyn – shot himself during police encounter

Miguel Richards, Age 31 – September 2017 - Bronx – shot and killed

Cornell Lockhart, Age 67 – November 2017 – Bronx – shot and killed

Dwayne Pritchett, Age 48 – January 2018 – Bronx – neck compression and killed - ruled a homicide

James Owens, Age 63 - January 2018 - Brooklyn – shot and killed

Michael Hansford, Age 52 -- January 2018 - Bronx – shot and killed

Saheed Vassell , Age 34 - April 2018 - Brooklyn – shot and killed

Susan Muller, Age 54 - September 2018 – Queens – shot and killed

Kawaski Trawick, Age 32 - May 2019 - Bronx – shot and killed

Kwesi Ashun, Age 33 - October 2019 – Brooklyn - shot and killed

George Zapantis, Age 29 - July 2020 - Queens - tasered multiple times and killed

The police have shot, injured, and arrested many other people experiencing mental health crises, including:

Peyman Bahadoran, Age 55 - June 2020

Michael Cordero, 34 - March 2019

Jarrell Davis, Age 33 - March 2019

People living with mental health concerns have lives -- jobs, families and friends. Each of these individuals had a life too, and it mattered.

In order to address this ongoing crisis, CCIT-NYC has developed a proposal for a pilot program which would dispatch a “peer” (an individual with lived mental health experience) and an emergency medical technician (EMT) to de-escalate mental health crises. The CCIT-NYC pilot is modeled on the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon, which has operated successfully for over 30 years. Only 0.6 percent of CAHOOTS calls require police involvement, and not a single person -- mental health recipient or CAHOOTS team member -- has experienced any serious injury.

CCIT-NYC’s pilot would dispatch a health team to go out when anyone calls the proposed health care hotline. When you call for a healthcare worker you should get a healthcare worker, period.

A similar model of responding to urgent mental health calls with a peer and clinician is already being operated by Transitional Services of New York in eastern Queens. They helped 97% of the 3,000 individuals they served to remain in the home after their crisis call. Only three percent of the people they connected with needed to be transported to a hospital.

We believe that if the CCIT-NYC model of dispatching a peer and an EMT had been in place when Walter Wallace’s family called the first or second time, he would have received the care he needed. Perhaps the health care team would have talked to him for an hour. Maybe he would have been taken to a health care location. Either way, the police would not have been involved, and Mr. Wallace would be alive today.

Toronto, San Francisco, Portland, Denver, and even Los Angeles have now started similar non-police, healthcare response programs.

We can do this in New York City today and prevent future tragedies. CCIT-NYC calls on Mayor de Blasio to fund the CCIT-NYC pilot program to dispatch health teams to respond to mental health crises.

The criminalization of those experiencing mental health crises must end.

About Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC (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.