

## Coalition for a Safer ABQ

April 1, 2021

Dear Albuquerque Bernalillo County Government Commission:

The Coalition for a Safer Albuquerque is writing, once again, to thank you for what you've been doing to address our Coalition's two core goals: decreasing the number of law enforcement encounters with people in our community who are not accused of committing a crime; and increasing access to health care and human services.

In our December letter to you, we urged the ABCGC to take eight actions to address two serious and chronic problems: (1) the City and County continue to inappropriately dispatch law enforcement personnel to situations where behavioral health and social services professionals are better equipped to handle the situation appropriately and (2) our community has an uncoordinated and ineffective approach to providing needed behavioral health and social services to people who need them.

We are very grateful that the City and County have agreed to take the first action proposed in our letter by entering into an Inter-Governmental Agreement to retain needed technical assistance; contracting for technical assistance from Via Positiva. However, the only commitment the City and County have thus far made is to have their consultant obtain a "Systems Gaps Analysis;" but the County and City have NOT committed to using Via Positiva address the essential next step that we proposed:

2. Using that technical assistance, adopt and implement a Strategic Plan to identify the goals, objectives, and strategies necessary to accomplish those goals.

This reluctance to commit to using technical assistance to establish and *implement* a joint City/County strategic plan is very problematic, and potentially catastrophic; because the City and County have a long track record of conducting studies and issuing reports, but then never implementing the recommendations. When on February 26, 2015, the County Commission voted to implement the behavioral health tax, it unanimously adopted Administrative Resolution NO. 2015-16, stating, in part:

numerous behavioral health task forces and study groups have formed to identify existing behavioral health care services, gaps, needs and priorities in Bernalillo County and have issued recommendations including: the City of Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Behavioral Health Task Force, The Forensic Intervention Consortium, and the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce Mental Health Task Force; ... the State of New Mexico, City of Albuquerque, the University of New Mexico Hospital and multiple private providers are providing poorly coordinated services in the County with limited resources to address the needs of the community; an intergovernmental agreement to create a governing body to oversee, fund, and create programs for the provision of behavioral health services may be required; . . . and a failure to properly organize, structure, fund,

manage and oversee the operations of the County's behavioral health care changes may lead to continued gaps in care

see at

[www.bernco.gov/uploads/FileLinks/2fcd4a02fa76488eba24ace364460075/Behavioral\\_Health\\_Resource\\_Development\\_Work\\_Group\\_AR\\_2015\\_31.pdf](http://www.bernco.gov/uploads/FileLinks/2fcd4a02fa76488eba24ace364460075/Behavioral_Health_Resource_Development_Work_Group_AR_2015_31.pdf)

The County's website lists the following studies and reports:

[Behavioral Health Needs and Gaps 2002 Executive Summary.](#)  
[City of Albuquerque Crisis Triage Services Consultant Recommendations/2004](#)  
[House Joint Memorial 17 Task Force Recommendations/2011](#)  
[Recommendations of City/County Task Force on Behavioral Health 2014](#)  
[Administrative Resolution - Unified and Coordinated Behavioral Health System](#)  
[Administrative Resolution – Behavioral Health Resource Development Work Group](#)

See at <https://www.bernco.gov/Department-Behavioral-Health-Services/about-the-initiative.aspx>

Additionally, in December 2015, the County's contractor from Arizona issued a Business Plan for the rollout of the Behavioral Health Initiative. <https://www.bernco.gov/Department-Behavioral-Health-Services/archived-material-.aspx>. Unfortunately, that business plan has not been implemented, and is apparently no longer being treated as applicable.

In December 2019, the Bernalillo County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) issued the most recent study of our local system:

["Analysis of Bernalillo County's System for Serving People with Mental Illnesses and Criminal Justice Involvement"](#) see at <https://web-bernco.sks.com/county-manager/news-1.aspx?2db258aa42a04430b8b8a83f4c866d4ablogPostId=57dd391e55604d968b70e2df03303376#/BlogContent>.

The CJCC assigned responsibility for implementing the recommendations from the December 2019 report to its Diversion and Re-entry Subcommittee. But, after the Covid pandemic hit, that subcommittee's functionality has been quite limited. It has a meeting scheduled for April 1, 2021, to re-activate its work.

In light of this long, and disheartening, history of studies and gap analyses that have never resulted in significant change, we are very concerned that neither the City nor the County has committed to using Via Positiva, or any other technical assistance consultant, to address the central and chronic problems that were identified by the other studies.

Accordingly, conducting yet another "study" could similarly accomplish very little (at a cost of \$160,000). Therefore, we again request that the City and County commit that they will use Via Positiva (or another consultant) not just to conduct a "Systems Gaps Analysis," but to work with the City and County to (a) establish a joint strategic plan and then (b) assist in the actual implementation of that plan.

Moreover, this need for the implementation of a joint strategic plan was highlighted at the March ABCGC meeting through the discussion of the situations of two struggling community members.

These individuals' inability to access needed services derived largely in part to not knowing what services are available and where or how to access these services. The average person has no idea how to navigate the current system. The average person should not have to attend ABCGC to learn about available services, or more importantly, become involved in the criminal justice system in order to access services. The stories of these individuals' make it evident that while the City and the County make strides to identify and close gaps, that impact is not commonly felt in the community.

For all of these reason, and as we stated in our previous letter to the ABCGC, we urgently request that the ABCGC formally adopt the following action steps:

2. Develop a management system that will be used to monitor and evaluate progress toward achieving the goals, using timelines and measurable objectives as benchmarks and designating the person or persons responsible for meeting identified timelines.
3. The overarching goal of the Strategic Plan is to establish a genuine Continuum of Care for the metropolitan Albuquerque area that encompasses the activities of both the City and the County. For the first time the Strategic Plan will establish a coordinated approach to all City and County personnel and resources that are intended to address the behavioral health and social service needs of our community, including, but not limited to, responses to urgent and non-urgent requests for assistance that come through 911 and 311 calls or through other City and County-funded systems.
4. Establish a forum in which representatives of local community-based organizations, advocacy groups and other key stakeholders' meet regularly with City and County officials, and with representatives of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque Public Schools, and State Human Services Department officials to assist with implementation of the Strategic Plan.
5. Immediately convene a working group to compile and utilize existing (quantitative and qualitative) data. The group should collect the existing data already possessed by the City, County, State and UNM that address local behavioral health, social service, and justice system issues to analyze and identify the prevalence and nature of the needs and gaps in the current system of service delivery. By compiling and culling existing information and data from the UNM Institute for Social Research; from service delivery and outcome measure reports in the possession of both the City Department of Family and Community Services and the County Behavioral Health Initiative; as well as relevant data compiled by law enforcement, the courts and the Metropolitan Detention Center, the ABCGC can establish quantitative outcome measures, and track them over time.
6. Assign personnel to liaison with other communities that already have existing initiatives that have similar goals and from which the ABCGC's program design and development can be supported.
7. Coordinate with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Institute for Social Research to catalogue, and track, the prevalence of encounters with individuals who

utilize a disproportionate share of government resources; then develop care plans that minimize the cost of meeting their needs, while improving their situations.

Finally, we are offering to meet (via Zoom) with any ABCGC members who agree to participate in a working meeting with our Coalition to meaningfully discuss whether to, and how to, implement our recommendations. Our steering committee will be having it's usual meeting on Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at noon. You and/or your staff are invited. Feel free to reach out to any of our steering committee members, or email us at [CoalitionforaSaferABQ@gmail.com](mailto:CoalitionforaSaferABQ@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

**Coalition for a Safer ABQ Steering Committee:**

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