

Coalition for a Safer ABQ

December 31, 2020

Dear Albuquerque Bernalillo County Government Commission:

The Coalition for a Safer Albuquerque is comprised of concerned individuals, many of whom have decades of professional experience working with or on behalf of our community's most vulnerable citizens. Some of us have lived experience receiving behavioral health services; others are family members of people who receive, or want to receive, behavioral health services; some have experienced problematic actions by local law enforcement personnel; and, collectively, we speak for the people who are being harmed by the *status quo*. Combined, we have hundreds of person-years of experience trying to improve how our local government uses our tax dollars to deal with people with disabilities, substance dependence, and/or who experience homelessness. We are writing to urge you, our local leaders, to take immediate action to reduce the unnecessary harm resulting from our current disorganized and ineffective approaches.

As a direct result of national outrage over the pattern of senseless killings of men and women of color at the hands of law enforcement, communities everywhere are demanding that the culture and roles of law enforcement be changed, and that community well-being is prioritized. Now is the time for our greater Albuquerque community to respond effectively and competently to the calls for a socially just system for responding to the needs of our community; simultaneously relieving law enforcement personnel of the unfair burden of responding to social problems, enabling them to focus on reducing crime.

Our coalition is dedicated to 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. We unequivocally assert that Albuquerque's new Public Safety initiative must not, in any way, be an extension of existing law enforcement culture, its bureaucracy, or its unions.

We implore the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Government Commission to act now to institute the following strategies for ensuring that this historic moment in time is not squandered; and that the City, the County bring about a fundamental change in how people with disabilities, substance dependence, and/or who experience homelessness are treated.

We believe that City and County officials owe it to our community to take prompt action so that the substantial time, money, and other resources now being utilized to (a) develop the City's Public Safety initiative and (b) implement the County's Behavioral Health Initiative will be used efficiently and in a more coordinated and coherent fashion, to achieve maximum success and sustainability:

1. Through the ABCGC, promptly retain technical assistance from veteran administrators who have experience in operating government-funded community-based behavioral health and social services that are both evidence-based and effective.

2. Using that technical assistance, adopt and implement a Strategic Plan to establish a genuine Continuum of Care for the metropolitan Albuquerque area that encompasses and, for the first time, establishes 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.
3. Establish a forum in which representatives of local community-based organizations and groups 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 implement that strategic plan.
4. Immediately put in place a working group to compile and utilize existing (quantitative and qualitative) data. That 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—in order to analyze and identify the prevalence and nature of the issues they face. 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.
5. 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.
6. Work 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.

Please have your staff contact us to arrange a meeting for moving forward on these steps and allow us an opportunity to address these issues further at your next monthly meeting.

Sincerely,

Coalition for a Safer ABQ steering committee