

## **Police Should Not Respond to People in Emotional Distress/Crisis: The Urgent Need for Non-Coercive Supports and Services**

In the wake of nationwide protests in response to police killings of people of color, there have been calls from activists to defund the police. Many in the defund police movement have rightly called for an end to police involvement in calls related to people in emotional distress/mental health crisis and in doing so-called “wellness/welfare checks,” situations which are clearly not appropriate for police intervention. Many have also called for passing the responsibility for handling emotional crises from police to the mental health system.

The National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy (NARPA) strongly supports the call to end police involvement in calls related to emotional distress/mental health crises. We also strongly oppose passing this responsibility on to existing public mental health systems. While the call to replace cops with mental health clinicians may be well-meaning, many who support this action may not realize that the mental health system is a white-dominated, violent, coercive, and unaccountable structure that disproportionately harms people of color, rests on the threat of force, and is complicit with the carceral state and the prison industrial complex.

NARPA believes it is imperative to replace coercive responses with well-funded local systems of non-coercive, voluntary supports and services for people in emotional distress, especially peer support services and peer-run crisis alternatives. In addition, we call for community investment in the welfare of people, particularly marginalized groups, to ensure that everyone has access to the kind of essential human services that help protect people from the trauma that contributes to emotional distress, including health care, housing, education, and employment services that are anti-racist in perspective and practice.