

Good afternoon,

As the Public Safety Director for the Swatara Township Police Department I am honored to speak to the Behavioral Health Commission on this important topic about mental health issues in Pennsylvania.

I have been employed as a Police Officer for over 33 years and during this time I have certainly seen a lot of changes with the way we deal with human beings that are experiencing mental health issues. It was not uncommon early on in my career to have to arrest someone to help deal with the situation we had been called to or discovered. It was frustrating because officers were trying to make sure we were placing the round peg in the round hole. I have witnessed officers transport persons to a coffee shop and give them money to get something to eat rather than have to arrest them. There were not sufficient options available for our officers at that time to divert someone away from the criminal justice system.

I am pleased to say that this situation has improved greatly in the last several years and I believe Dauphin County has been a leader in giving our officers more tools in their tool belt. Over 10 years ago we accepted a victim witness employee into our ranks of the department that we share a co salary with Dauphin County. This employee aids officers and victims of crimes and domestic violence to ensure they are receiving proper compensation and assistance while they are going through a difficult time. This advocate helps our officers by making sure our victims are taken care of and prepared to deal with the difficulties of navigating the court system.

It was due to this success and great cooperative agreement with Dauphin County that I was eager to again partner with the County when we were approached about placing a Mental Health Co responder within Swatara Township Police Department. Dr Ashley Yinger made sure to include the leadership of the Dauphin County Chiefs of Police Association in assisting in the hiring process to ensure we were getting persons who would work well with our officers. I think it would be honest to say that there was some concern the police officers would not be receptive to having another civilian employee embedded within their ranks. We worked closely with Dauphin County and were able to establish a working MOU and quickly discovered that this is a program that was sorely needed. It has worked so well that I requested Swatara Township to have our own full time Co responder when we initially were slated to share a Co responder with another municipality. The feedback from our police officers has been resoundingly positive as this has made it easier for them to make sure human beings are being guided towards programs that are designed to help them deal with their mental health issues. Our Co responder routinely does follow up with the people she encounters, and this has drastically reduced the police contacts with these same persons. It is the goal of the Swatara Police Department to have all our officers successfully complete CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training. This cooperative agreement and program have greatly assisted me as the leader of this department in providing de-escalation resources to our personnel. The continued cooperative partnerships we have with social service agencies in the county also helps establish a culture of caring and compassion.

The Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative or LETI is another program that has been accepted by our department with the goal of assisting individuals suffering from substance abuse disorder into treatment. This is still a relatively new program, and we are working with the county to get our officers

trained. The initial feedback from officers is that it's a great program and officers are receptive of the treatment option but some of the requirements to get a person into the program may be too restrictive. We look forward to working with our partners to make this a very usable option for our staff.

Our department also has a working contract with neighborhood dispute settlement, and we have a good relationship with Crisis intervention.

I think most people understand that there will always be a need for armed Police Officers to make arrests and maintain peace and order. I also know that in Dauphin County a culture has been established from the top down that we expect our professionals to be caring and compassionate as well and we have taken a leadership role in providing the proper resources to assist them in that goal.

I look forward to assisting this Commission in addressing complex issues facing our society regarding behavioral health. We pledge to keep an open mind and to remain transparent in our efforts. Thank you for all you have done to assist our officers and our embedded social service employees in completing their mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darrell R. Reider', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Darrell R. Reider

Swatara Township Public Safety Director