



Bazelon Center Files Brief Arguing that D.C. Must Send Mental Health Staff, not Police, to People Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis

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Washington, D.C. – The Bazelon Center submitted [an amicus brief](#) in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia arguing that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the District of Columbia to make a mental health rather than a police response to people experiencing a mental health crisis.

The District dispatches medical personnel in response to physical health emergencies, but almost always sends armed police officers to respond to mental health emergencies. As the brief explains, this disparity violates the ADA and results in avoidable use of force, arrests, incarceration, injury, and death.

Individuals experiencing a heart attack or a diabetic crisis would not expect the police to respond to a call to help them or to be treated as a threat and be handcuffed and placed in the back of a police car. Yet, this is how individuals experiencing a mental health crisis are treated, even though sending the police is more likely to exacerbate, than alleviate, the situation.

A mental health response would relieve burdens on already overburdened police officers who are not equipped to deal with mental health crises. Moreover, the District would realize cost savings from using mental health workers rather than police as responders. Studies demonstrate that when communities send the police to respond to individuals in crisis, taxpayer costs are significantly higher than when an appropriate response is made.

Rather than continuing to rely on the police, the brief argues, the District must expand its mental health crisis services. Additional mobile mental health teams are needed, as well as staffed crisis apartments and respite centers.

[The brief](#), co-authored by the firm of BakerHostetler, was filed on behalf of Mental Health America, American Association of People with Disabilities, Bazelon Center, Miriam's Kitchen, Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, Total Family Care Coalition, Whitman-Walker Health, The Arc of D.C., Disability Rights D.C. at University Legal Services, and School Justice Project.

About the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law: *The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law protects and advances the civil rights of people with mental health and developmental disabilities – especially Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other historically marginalized populations. We envision a society where our constituents with mental disabilities live with autonomy, dignity, and opportunity in welcoming communities supported by law, policy, and practices that help them reach their full potential. For more information, visit: bazelon.org. This year, the Bazelon Center celebrates 50 years of advocacy. To learn more about our advocacy throughout the years, visit bazelon50.org.*