

City of San Antonio



Minutes Public Safety Committee

2021 – 2023 Council Members

Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6
Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2 | Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3
Ana Sandoval, Dist. 7 | Clayton Perry, Dist. 10

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

9:30 AM

City Hall

The Public Safety Committee convened a regular meeting in City Hall at 9:37 AM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Chair*
Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, *Member*
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*
Ana Sandoval, *Member*
Clayton Perry, *Member*

Members Absent: None

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from the September 27, 2022 Public Safety Committee Meeting.

Councilmember Viagran moved to Approve the minutes from the September 27, 2022 Public Safety Committee Meeting. Councilmember Sandoval seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Cabello Havrda, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Sandoval, Perry

Public Comment

There was no Public Comment.

Briefing

- 2. Briefing by the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) and San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) on the mental health programs and training provided to first responders with expertise and resources to address mental health and drug addiction issues which are often underlying factors that influence criminal activity and quality of life issues, and a briefing on wellness programs designed to promote first responders' safety and well-being** [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager; William P. McManus, Chief of Police; Charles N. Hood, Fire Chief]

Deputy City Manager Maria Villagomez introduced the Item and Chief of Police William McManus and Fire Chief Charles Hood who provided a co-presentation. Chief McManus introduced Assistant Chief Karen Falks and Chief Hood introduced Deputy Chief Andrew Estrada.

Chief McManus provided background on the Mental Health Unit at the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) which included dedicated resources, personnel and the number of calls over the past four years. Estrada provided background on the San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) Mobile Integrated Health Unit which included dedicated resources, personnel and the number of calls over the past four years. Both explained that the number of calls had increased since 2019 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Chief McManus mentioned that all Officers and Firefighters who completed the 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) became certified. Estrada added that this training was offered to all Fire and Police Cadets and had expanded to train others. Estrada reported that the SA CORE Pilot Program (Community Outreach Resiliency Effort) included a Crisis Response Clinician, Mobile Integrated Healthcare Paramedic and a Mental Health Unit Police Officer with 792 call responses since its inception in April 2022.

Estrada described the proactive Program for Intensive Care Collaboration (PICC) between SAPD, SAFD, Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Committee (STRAC) and the Center for Health Care Services (CHCS) and listed the goals of the Program as helping people re-engage in the community in a positive way.

Chief McManus described the Chronic Crisis Stabilization Initiative (CCSI) which had a goal to address mental health issues. Estrada stated that the Opiate Overdose Prevention and Crisis Response Program which had a goal of identifying individuals experiencing an overdose, provided prescribed medication to help individuals get into treatment for substance abuse.

Chief McManus provided information on the Behavior Threat Assessment provided through the FUSION Center in collaboration with the Mental Health Unit, SAFD and the Bexar County Sheriff's Office. Chief McManus listed SAPD Officer Wellness Programs including the creation of a wellness committee that would survey Officers in order to identify wellness service needs.

Chief Hood provided information on the SAFD Mental Health Programs: Cotico Wellness Application, annual behavioral health screening, 24-Hour Employee Crisis Hotline that offered peer

support, one full time staff Psychologist and 19 volunteer Chaplains. Chief Hood listed the next steps in Mental Health Program services for SAFD.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Cabello Havrda thanked the Chiefs for their presentations and expressed that there needed to be a focus on the mental health of our first responders since there had been seven suicides of Police Officers in the last 20 months. She added that Police Officers and Firefighters were still human and a part of our community who often witnessed very horrific things on the job.

Chair Cabello Havrda mentioned that she had spoken to K9s for Warriors and suggested there could be a partnership for support dogs. Chair Cabello Havrda asked how the SAPD Peer Support Officers were trained. Falks stated that they received similar training to the Mental Health Unit but, in addition, a majority of them had experience in Officer involved shootings or other traumatic experiences throughout their career or personal life. Chair Cabello Havrda suggested including an option for outside experts.

Chief Hood stated that SAFD had 58 diverse peer supporters trained by the staff Psychologist and a hotline staffed by retired Firefighters and he explained that the Cortico Application provided real-time convenient intervention. Chair Cabello Havrda suggested expanding the Cortico Application to SAPD. Estrada added that the application provided a “Get Help Now” button that allows the Firefighter to reach someone they know. Falks stated that SAPD had partnered with the SA 100 Club to provide the Cortico Application.

Councilmember Perry asked how many suicides the SAPD and SAFD had this year, what was the trend and recommended benchmarking with other cities. Chief McManus stated that there were four this year which was an increase. Chief Hood stated that the SAFD had not had a suicide in years. Councilmember Perry suggested that SAPD review the SAFD program to increase services and suggested an external review of services at SAPD. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that the City Manager had sent a memo describing a committee that was planned to review the SAPD programs which included a review of best practices and cross functional teams. Deputy City Manager Villagomez commented that suicide numbers had increased nationwide for police and McManus confirmed that he had discussions with Police Chiefs of other cities about suicide rates and prevention programs.

Councilmember Perry expressed disappointment that there had been seven suicides over the last 20 months and recommended more action. Deputy City Manager Villagomez clarified that two of those were retired Officers and the others were on active duty. Councilmember Perry recommended seeking more assistance for Officers.

Councilmember Viagran suggested that therapy dogs be placed at every Fire Station and recommended reviewing the programs for SAPD separate from SAFD because of the differences in the job and personnel. She noted that there was a culture or stigma that prevented SAPD Officers from seeking help. She suggested there should be mental health check-ins with Officers at regular intervals, not just during crisis because they saw the worst of humanity in their work and their own life situation was not considered. Councilmember Viagran provided her experience as a Mental Health Crisis Worker as an example of the need to identify partnerships with agencies who could

provide more resources for Officers.

Chief McManus agreed that there was a stigma attached to seeking help in the police culture with the concern that they could lose their job, their gun or their assignment which created a reluctance to report mental health issues. Chief McManus recommended widening the avenues for help and continually reinforcing that it was acceptable to reach out for help.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez agreed that there was a stigma related to mental health services in general, particularly at SAPD but recommended collecting employee data to determine unduplicated utilization rates and effectiveness of the current resources provided. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked if there had been an increase in substance use in the departments and suggested including that data in the survey. Chief McManus stated that the department performed random drug testing and had not seen an increase in drug use. Chief Hood stated that the employees were asked questions during their annual physicals about alcohol and drug use. Chief Hood added that after a crisis incident, the affected personnel had the potential to act out and recommended debriefings after every crisis call.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez commented that first responders joined the departments to solve problems but every day there were increased stressful events that might lead Officers and Firefighters to lose faith in humanity and recommended a holistic approach to engage with not just the employee but their families as well.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended that Veterans who were hired into these positions should be provided psychological evaluations and mental health services from the beginning of their job and that mental health services be provided throughout the career of the first responder. Chief Hood acknowledged that there were more Veterans being hired that might have experienced crisis during war. Dr. John Price with Psychological Services recommended that their screening assessment occur during the end of the hiring process and described the evaluations provided as well as services.

Councilmember Perry asked if any of the seven officers who had committed suicide were in contact with Psychological Services. Dr. Price stated that the information could not be provided due to HIPAA rules. Councilmember Perry recommended a proactive approach with everyone running through the office for a wellness check on a regular basis. Dr. Price suggested making first line supervisors more effective.

Councilmember Sandoval also recommended a regular check-in with the mental health professionals for SAPD Officers. The Chiefs confirmed that SAFD required a mental health screening in conjunction with their annual physical but SAPD did not require annual physicals. Councilmember Sandoval expressed concern that those who did not reach out might be the ones that needed the help the most and this seemed to be a voluntary program. Falks noted that SAPD had eight Chaplains (one at each substation) and 3 Psychologists. Councilmember Sandoval expressed concern and asked that when an Officer was involved in a crisis situation such as an Officer-involved shooting would that individual receive counseling. Dr. Price stated there was a debrief immediately following the completion of the report related to an Officer-involved shooting to explain available services.

Councilmember Viagran requested more information about the committee and suggested that stress prevention needed to be prioritized. Councilmember Viagran suggested developing a model that could be replicated City-wide. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that Police Officer and large department wellness programs were a priority for the City Manager. Chair Cabello Havrda recommended including civilian employees as well as uniform in the mental health program.

Chair Cabello Havrda asked where the suicide statistics were maintained and how Officers were made aware of services. Chief McManus explained that the suicide statistics were maintained by the personnel unit. Falks stated that services were discussed at roll call and through other means. Chair Cabello Havrda suggested that there could be more traumatic experiences besides Officer-involved shootings. Chief Hood added that accidents where children were injured or killed were treated as traumatic experiences and the responders were provided immediate mental health intervention. Falk stated that the committee was discussing these items and would continue to take the City Council recommendations into consideration.

Chair Cabello Havrda maintained that it was time to elevate services to adjust to what was happening today and supported more discussion and culture shift that reduced the stigma of mental health treatment.

Chair Cabello Havrda commented that the Item was for Briefing, so no action was taken.

3. Briefing by the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) and San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) on coordination efforts with area school districts during critical incidents [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager; William P. McManus, Chief of Police; Charles N. Hood, Fire Chief]

SAPD Chief McManus began the presentation with statistics that showed since the year 2000 there had been 450 school attacks in the United States. Chief McManus stated that there had been an increase in hoax calls since the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. SAFD Chief Hood provided an info-graphic including the phases of emergency incident management. Chief McManus provided information on the Southwest Texas Fusion Center that covered 42 counties in South Texas. Chief Hood listed mitigation strategies developed by the Public Safety Threat Assessment Group (PSTAG). Chief McManus provided information on the Behavioral Threat Assessment Group (BTAG) and Chief Hood provided information on the PSTAG.

Chief McManus described the Standard Response Protocol that included: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter. Chief McManus stated that SAPD had provided 123 school presentations since May 2022. Chief Hood stated SAFD had completed school planning sessions in 87% of Middle and High Schools. Chief Hood mentioned that the Rescue Task Force was developed in 2016 which was considered an industry best practice for their continued work.

Chief McManus described the SAPD response to an active school threat which began with determining if the threat was a hoax or real, and, if real, neutralizing the threat. Chief Hood asserted that the lack of a unified command created the largest negative impact on response. Chief Hood described the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF), the need for whole blood, and post incident analysis.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Cabello Havrda requested a breakdown of who should be in charge of a school shooting incident. Chief McManus stated that initially, the school police supervisor would be in charge but once SAPD was called, the SAPD supervisor would be in command. Chief Hood explained that the first person on scene was in command until other resources were on-scene. Chair Cabello Havrda recommended drills to help prepare and a communication with parents. Chief McManus suggested development of a standard communication protocol.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested a response memo for today's meeting. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that a memo would include responses to unanswered questions from the Committee meeting. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested information on how City Council could help with the school program, school hardening efforts/recommendations, how and when parents could get information, who was responsible to communicate with the media, and recommended that a communication plan be developed.

Larry Rodriguez, Regional 20 School Safety Administrator, stated that his office coordinated with school districts to provide information on best practices and good communication systems.

Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that the goal was to provide accurate information to the community as soon as possible and to coordinate among departments and others for consistency.

Councilmember Sandoval thanked Chief McManus and his team for responding to the recent Jefferson High School hoax incident and stated that the SAPD response was perfect except for the unexpected surge of parents that came to the school. Councilmember Sandoval lamented that administration were forced to spend so much money on school safety versus education of our children.

Councilmember Viagran commented that the incident in Uvalde brought this to the forefront even though she was confident that our SAPD had a plan but also recommended a unified code and checklist for all schools, particularly the smaller ones. She recommended lobbying the State Legislature to reduce hoax threats as these were very costly in time, money and emotion. Councilmember Viagran recommended a list of local and State agencies that were anticipated to be a part of a unified command. Chief Hood stated that resources within the city limits were excellent but there needed to be more advanced coordination outside of the city limits. Councilmember Viagran recommended a dialogue with Bexar County and the Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) to create the unified command.

Chair Cabello Havrda commented that the Item was for Briefing, so no action was taken.

4. Briefing by Animal Care Services on the Animal Care Services Strategic Plan [David W. McCary, Assistant City Manager; Shannon Sims, Director, Animal Care Services]

Due to limited time, the Animal Care Services Briefing was postponed to the November 2022 meeting.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session held.

Consideration of items for future meetings

Chair Cabello Havrda announced that the Animal Care Services Strategic Plan would be briefed at the next meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, Chair Cabello Havrda adjourned the meeting at 11:39 PM.

Approved

Melissa Cabello Havrda, Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk