

CITY OF OAKLAND



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Date: March 2, 2021
To: Members of City Council and Members of the Public
From: Vice Mayor Rebecca Kaplan
Re: Recommendation for Launching In-House Civilian Responders for MACRO

Dear Colleagues on the City Council and Members of the Public,

In order to improve responsiveness to the public, and the handling of a variety of cases such as those involving mental health needs, there is growing recognition of the value and effectiveness of providing for civilian responders. In Oakland, grassroots community members have been advocating for this for several years, and we worked together to include funding to work toward this goal in our 2019 budget. In the intervening time, public support and data in support of these programs has increased, and other jurisdictions have launched such programs. Oakland's initial analysis included looking at the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon and others, and has led to a proposed program for Oakland now known as MACRO (Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland).

Prior press coverage of this has noted:

Oakland didn't just rush to adopt MACRO following the nationwide protests in response to the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor earlier this year. In fact, the pilot program is the product of years of grassroots research and advocacy.

"We need to have a mental health response for mental health needs," said Kaplan. "Sending someone who has a gun and doesn't have mental health training makes no sense. If someone was having a mental health crisis and we sent a plumber, people would be like, 'Why are you doing this?'"

<https://oaklandside.org/2020/06/29/call-911-for-a-counselor-oakland-will-pilot-an-alternative-to-police/>

In addition, it has been pointed out that:

"It's about humanizing the human condition, rather than criminalizing it," said Cat Brooks.

"Understanding what got you to that place, what are the conditions that ended you up in that place, how we can avoid those things and then what is the long-term path of healing for you."

<https://48hills.org/2020/08/oakland-group-launches-non-police-mental-health-hotline/>

I urge that we undertake implementation of civilian responders to help protect the health and safety of our community, through the use of a method with endurance, effectiveness, accountability and transparency, with in-house positions.

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The Oakland City Council previously approved taking action to work toward doing the Mobile Assistance Community Responders Of Oakland (MACRO) Program with City Of Oakland civilian employees as provided in Resolution No. [88433 CMS](#).

I believe the immediate creation of in-house staff civilian response positions for MACRO is in the best interest of the city and aligns with the interests of labor, community, and health leaders in the City of Oakland.

BACKGROUND

On June 10, 2019, following extensive community work and input, and pressure to use more effective, non-police response for certain community needs like mental health calls, I presented my Council President's Proposed Budget Amendments for the Fiscal Year 2019-21 Proposed Policy Budget, which included funding to conduct a CAHOOTS Model Feasibility Analysis Study, to design a plan for a civilian responder program in Oakland, including by reviewing the program in Eugene, Oregon, and elsewhere. Such programs have been found to save money and save lives. This model was ultimately included in the final 2019-2020 Mid-Cycle budget. The City Council later approved funding in the FY 2020-21 Mid-Cycle Budget Amendments ([88174 CMS](#)) to implement the proposed program.

On December 15, 2020, my resolution to pursue the option for in-house hiring process for MACRO was adopted by Council ([88433 CMS](#)). This resolution directed the City Administrator and his designees to begin the process of reviewing options for the creation of Oakland City staff civilian response positions for the MACRO Program pursuant to Resolution No. [87759 C.M.S.](#) and report back to Council.

FEASIBILITY AND SUPPORT OF AN IN-HOUSE PROGRAM

The creation of in-house Oakland City staff civilian response positions is feasible and would ensure the expansion and sustainability of the program beyond the launch. Through keeping MACRO in-house, the City would have oversight of the program and have the ability to monitor compliance.

An example of how to successfully expeditiously implement a MACRO-like program and manage it in-house can be found across the Bay in San Francisco. This past November, San Francisco launched the first phase of its Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT) pilot program <https://sfmayor.org/article/san-franciscos-new-street-crisis-response-team-launches-today>. These new teams, which consist of a community paramedic, a behavioral health clinician, and a behavioral health peer specialist, respond to 911 calls that SFPD previously answered regarding people experiencing behavioral health crises. The goal is for additional teams to be phased in and operate citywide, 7 days per week and up to 24 hours a day, which will allow them to respond to approximately 17,000 calls for service per year, the equivalent to the number of non-violent "mentally disturbed person" calls to which the Police Department currently responds. The program is a collaboration between the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the San Francisco Fire Department with significant support from the Department of Emergency Management. The San Francisco Police Department is also a key partner in the transition of certain types of 911 calls to the new teams.

Labor and community leaders and stakeholders in Oakland strongly support having the MACRO program in-house.

Zac Unger, the President of Local 55 Oakland Firefighters stated:

"Oakland firefighters stand ready to support this program [MACRO] so the OFD can continue to provide the quick, effective, and creative solutions that Oakland citizens rely on us for."

<https://twitter.com/zacunger/status/1362943565937004545?s=10>

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Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Recommendation:

“Immediately establish MACRO (Mobile Assistance Community Responders Oakland) as an in-house city service by a) Creation of Oakland city staff civilian positions within a city department with sufficient administrative capacity such as the Fire Dept. b) Funding a 3 phase expansion of MACRO to cover most areas of Oakland within 3 years and a minimum of 20% of low-level nonviolent 911 calls. City should calculate annual cost savings from reduction in 911 calls responded to by OPD and transfer a minimum of 50% of savings from those calls toward funding ongoing MACRO expansion.”

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:61a4fc80-7cbe-461c-b7f9-2e6ccad8d384>

See also, coverage of community groups’ advocacy for this effort:

“Groups in Oakland like the Coalition for Police Accountability and Anti Police-Terror Project have long pushed for eliminating a police response from circumstances where other methods could be more humane and effective.

‘One of the things you hear over and over again in these discussions with unhoused folks is, there are times we really need to call somebody, but we need it not to be the police,’ said Anne Janks, and organizer with the Coalition for Police Accountability, which began pushing the city to adopt a MACRO-like program in early 2019.”

<https://oaklandside.org/2020/06/29/call-911-for-a-counselor-oakland-will-pilot-an-alternative-to-police/>

SEIU 1021, City of Oakland Chapter President, Felipe Cuevas Statement:

“As members and leaders of our community, the working people of SEIU 1021’s City of Oakland chapter have always supported the idea of the MACRO program as a safe, smart way to serve Oakland’s residents. In the interest of getting the program up and running as quickly as possible. These positions must be the kinds of good, permanent, in-house, union jobs that allow working people to get ahead in Oakland and that lift up our whole community - and the interests of the program are best served by bringing those jobs in house to have a reliable program.

San Francisco was able to get their first team into the streets within four months, and a second team two months later. We believe that if the City of Oakland works with us with that level of commitment to an expedited process, we can do the same.

We strongly support bringing these jobs in-house, and look forward to working with the City to craft the job specifications that will advance the MACRO program, best serve the residents of Oakland, and create good jobs for our members.”

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:c91f001f-c73c-41b6-9fe4-79e7c09e485a>

The specific suggestion to use the Fire Department has multiple advantages. This department already houses first responders, has capacity to handle issues that require an urgent response and to have personnel who are deployed, and already has a 9-1-1 dispatch system. In addition, the fire department already works 24/7, handles vehicles and radios, and is accustomed to having personnel who are on at night.

The MACRO model is no longer experimental. Since it was originally proposed for implementation in the City of Oakland, other cities have successfully launched similar programs. For example, Olympia, WA, Portland, OR, and Albuquerque, NM have undertaken similar programs using in-house staffing models to provide civilian response. Of particular interest to Oakland, the City of Portland, OR documented their lessons in a report that outlines action steps and decision points from idea to implementation: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yKmnWsIoXJqHo179FRaNtc-nFoNcMbUC/view>.

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Other programs have opened in the meantime, such as Mental Health First (MH1), providing community-based response phone line, support and referrals, and can help inform these efforts and provide best practices. The question is no longer whether MACRO could work, but how to make it work best for the City of Oakland, including in partnership with the fire department. What is needed now is effective implementation. By working with stakeholders, MACRO can be launched in a constructive, timely, and community minded way that is in the best interests of the City. Such a program should use best practices, coordination with labor partners, and be implemented together with community and stakeholders. I encourage that the Council authorize next steps to undertake this action to launch an effective, in-house program, including for the needed positions to be hired. This process should include SEIU Local 1021, as well as the Fire Chief in order to coordinate regarding new civilian positions within the fire department.

In addition, I would propose that we would move to:

Direct Administration to expedite next steps for launching in-house MACRO via the Fire Department, and Have the MACRO item come back to our next Council meeting (March 16th), with a report from the Fire Department including timeline of next steps, and any needed further authorizations, and any further actions to allocate funds, to expedite the launch of the in-house program, including to authorize and fund a program coordinator in the Fire Department.

Respectfully submitted,



Vice Mayor Rebecca Kaplan

See additional coverage of the history of these efforts at:

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/7/1/20677523/mental-health-police-cahoots-oregon-oakland-sweden> And: <https://www.patreon.com/posts/47835904>

See draft proposed job descriptions for the positions at:

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:713f0c81-258d-4a55-a0d5-fd17ed552617>]

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