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CJC REPORT ANALYZES MENTAL/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH 911 CALLS

The Criminal Justice Council of Santa Cruz County (CJC) has released its 2022 Annual Report, which provides the first-known regional comparative snapshot of law enforcement mental/behavioral health policies, trainings and procedures and an analysis of mental/behavioral calls-for-service and subsequent response to these calls by law enforcement and non-sworn mental health liaisons.

“Transparency is key to maintaining good relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve,” CJC Chair and Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend said. “This year’s report provides a baseline of understanding for our community on the scope of behavioral health calls and the public safety resources that respond. It’s clear that more needs to be done to better address the needs in this area and our hope is that this report provides the basis for that discussion.”

The report is by Watsonville-based Applied Survey Research. Among the key takeaways:

- Law enforcement personnel and mental health liaisons both feel having mental health liaisons accompany law enforcement on mental/behavioral health calls is beneficial, and mental health liaisons prefer responding to calls with law enforcement present.
- While mental health liaisons operate in the County and City of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville, two jurisdictions that do not currently work with mental health liaisons are interested in having mental health liaisons work with their departments.
- Call center data indicates mental health liaisons are scheduled during the time when most mental/behavioral health calls occur.

All departments surveyed provide officers with mental health incident training at least every two years, including Crisis Intervention Training, field officer mental health training, and Integrated Communication Assessment & Tactics training (ICAT), which is intended to diffuse and de-escalate critical incidents.

The report also outlines challenges in addressing mental health-related 911 calls, including the sheer number of calls – 577 between June 1 and August 15 alone – and the need for more local mental health beds. For more on the CJC, visit <https://santacruzjic.org>.