

Sept. 25, 2017

Last month, I was upset to hear that current funding would not be available to cover the costs of the CIP positions. This month I would change that descriptor from upset to terrified. The most puzzling aspect of that report was that the conclusion had already been drawn that this program was not “cost-effective.” Therefore, there wasn’t a plan already in place to sustain this program with alternate resources when the funding was gone.

I left the board meeting feeling bewildered and wondering what went wrong? What measurement would have improved the perception of the expenditure? Every time we hear about an interaction between law enforcement and a mental health client that goes wrong, we are reminded of how absolutely necessary a program such as CIP is. We know that the flames of stigma are fueled in the media every single time there is a negative incident and the barriers of stereotyping and suspicion that we are trying so hard to break down seem insurmountable.

I had the pleasure of listening to two members of the CIP team earlier this year when we were presenting at the CIT training for Mike Summers. They described their jobs as “the best thing they had ever done!” Obviously they felt that they were making a difference and so do I. So why is there such a gap in the evaluation of the program? There has to be a way to more adequately measure the successes of the CIP program. How do you quantify the feeling of safety that family members had knowing their call for help might be met with empathy rather than force while CIP was in place? How do you erase my fear knowing that the CIP team is no longer an option when I need help? Have you contrasted the costs of litigation when things go wrong when you evaluate the success of this program?

I think we can and must do better. Law enforcement deserves to have safe interactions with mental health clients and our loved ones living with mental health challenges certainly deserve it, too. Society deserves it so that we can **finally** have a chance to tear down the barriers.

As we approach the celebration of Mental Health Awareness Week, I ask you to take a deeper look at CIP. Find a better way to measure the good that it did. Find a cost-effective way to put a CIP-type position on every shift for first responders in each sector of the county. You cannot afford not to.