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Date of Hearing: Tuesday February 9th, 2021 at 1pm

Committee: Finance

Sponsored by: Senator Jill Carter

Bill Number: SB0398

Full Bill Title: Mental Health Law - Petitions for Emergency Evaluation - Procedures

Position: In Support of Passing HB0537/SB0398

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Sabah Muhammad. Not only do I serve as Legislative and Policy Counsel with the Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), I am a family member of a loved one diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

The Treatment Advocacy Center is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating legal and other barriers to the timely and effective treatment of severe mental illness (SMI).

We live in a country where our loved ones can deny a shot of long-term antipsychotic medication as a liberty right, then be shot and killed by police during a psychotic episode in the name of justice. None of us should sleep well at night knowing that individuals diagnosed with SMI are 16 times more likely to be killed in a police encounter than other citizens.

Steps taken to remove police as sole responders to a mental health crisis are steps in the right direction, therefore SB0398, which aims to mitigate police response to a mental health crisis by allowing medical workers to serve as first responders is a step in the right direction.

However, as long as volunteer required resources for individuals too sick to tell reality from delusion are the primary resources offered, we will continue to require police. The emergency begins when an individual is too sick to provide their basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. Waiting for that inability to turn suicidal or homicidal is negligent, inhumane and contradicts the desire to remove police from the medical crisis equation.

- Adults with severe mental illness account for one in four people killed in police encounters.
- Individuals with severe mental illness, account for just 3% to 5% of violent acts and they are 10 times more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crime.
- TAC found that about one-fifth of total law-enforcement staff time and 10% of law-enforcement agencies' total budgets in 2017 went toward responding to and transporting people with mental illness.

Thank you for your time and attention. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the importance of SB0398. It is a step in the right direction for families and communities in need of early intervention, long term well-being, and treatment before tragedy. I urge you to support SB0398.