

Daniel Buchholtz

From: Josh Antoine
Sent: Wednesday, November 22, 2023 10:21 AM
To: Daniel Buchholtz
Subject: Thoughts

Dear Mayor and Council,

I trust this message finds you well. I had intended to address this matter during the Council Workshop on Monday, but time constraints prevented me from doing so.

It's not news to anyone on the council that our department, like law enforcement agencies nationwide, has experienced a significant uptick in mental health-related calls in recent years. Various factors contribute to this trend.

While our officers are well-trained and attend to the needs of our community members grappling with mental health issues, it is crucial to recognize that officers should not be the sole resource in handling these types of calls.

Over the past few years, I've been actively researching and collaborating with other agencies to find a viable solution to this issue. In early 2023, two other Chiefs and I initiated discussions on a collaborative effort involving our three departments to share a full-time embedded social worker. Through a careful analysis of our departmental numbers, we concluded that individually, we may not have sufficient call volume to support our own embedded social worker. However, by pooling our resources, we believe we can effectively share one. The participating departments would be ours, Lino Lakes PD, and Centennial Lakes PD.

We've engaged in ongoing discussions with Canvas Health, an organization already partnered with Anoka County and providing two embedded social workers to the Columbia Heights PD. In our conversations with Canvas Health, we've identified a model that involves contracting for a full-time embedded social worker specifically assigned to our three departments. An advantage of this approach is that the social worker would be employed by Canvas Health, alleviating the Human Resources responsibilities from our departments.

I am seeking the council's approval to proceed with a shared grant application involving our department, Lino Lakes PD, and Centennial Lakes PD. This grant would enable us to fund the embedded social worker position for a minimum of two years without impacting our individual budgets. This initial period will serve as an opportunity to assess the benefits the embedded social worker brings to our police departments, allowing for a thorough re-evaluation before deciding on the continuation of the program.

Lino Lakes PD has a staff member on light-duty who has generously offered to research potential grants. Once identified, Canvas Health has committed to providing assistance from their in-house grant writer to support our departments in preparing the grant application.

While I prefer discussing matters in person, I'm open to addressing any questions you may have about this potential opportunity. I am hesitant to proceed without the council's support, and I firmly believe that this initiative presents a low-risk opportunity for our city to have an embedded social worker. The anticipated benefits, in my opinion, outweigh any potential challenges associated with the position.

Thank you for your time, and I wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

Josh

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