



Alternative Emergency Response (AER) in Somerville

Public Health & Public Safety Committee
February 27, 2023



Presenters:



Jim Vetter, EdM
*Executive Director,
Social-Emotional Learning
Alliance for Massachusetts
Ward 7*



Tobin Rodriguez, LICSW
*Director of Emergency
Psychiatric Services, Boston
Medical Center
Ward 3*



**Lauren Leone, DAT, LMHC,
ATR-BC**
*Licensed Mental Health Counselor,
Board-Certified Art Therapist
Ward 2*



Presentation Outline:

- I. Why Alternative Emergency Response in Somerville and Why Now?
(Jim Vetter)
- II. Current Emergent Behavioral Health Response Systems in Somerville
(Tobin Rodriguez)
- III. Vision for Alternative Public Safety In Somerville (Dr. Lauren Leone)

Why Alternative Emergency Response in Somerville and Why Now?

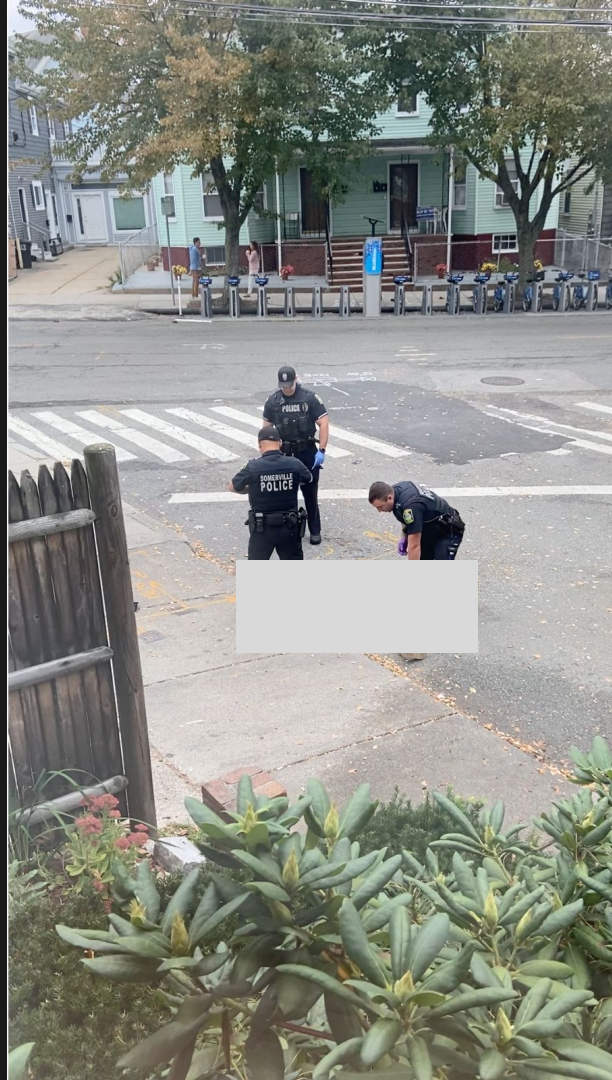


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Est. 19



October 3, 2021
outside 3 Moore St



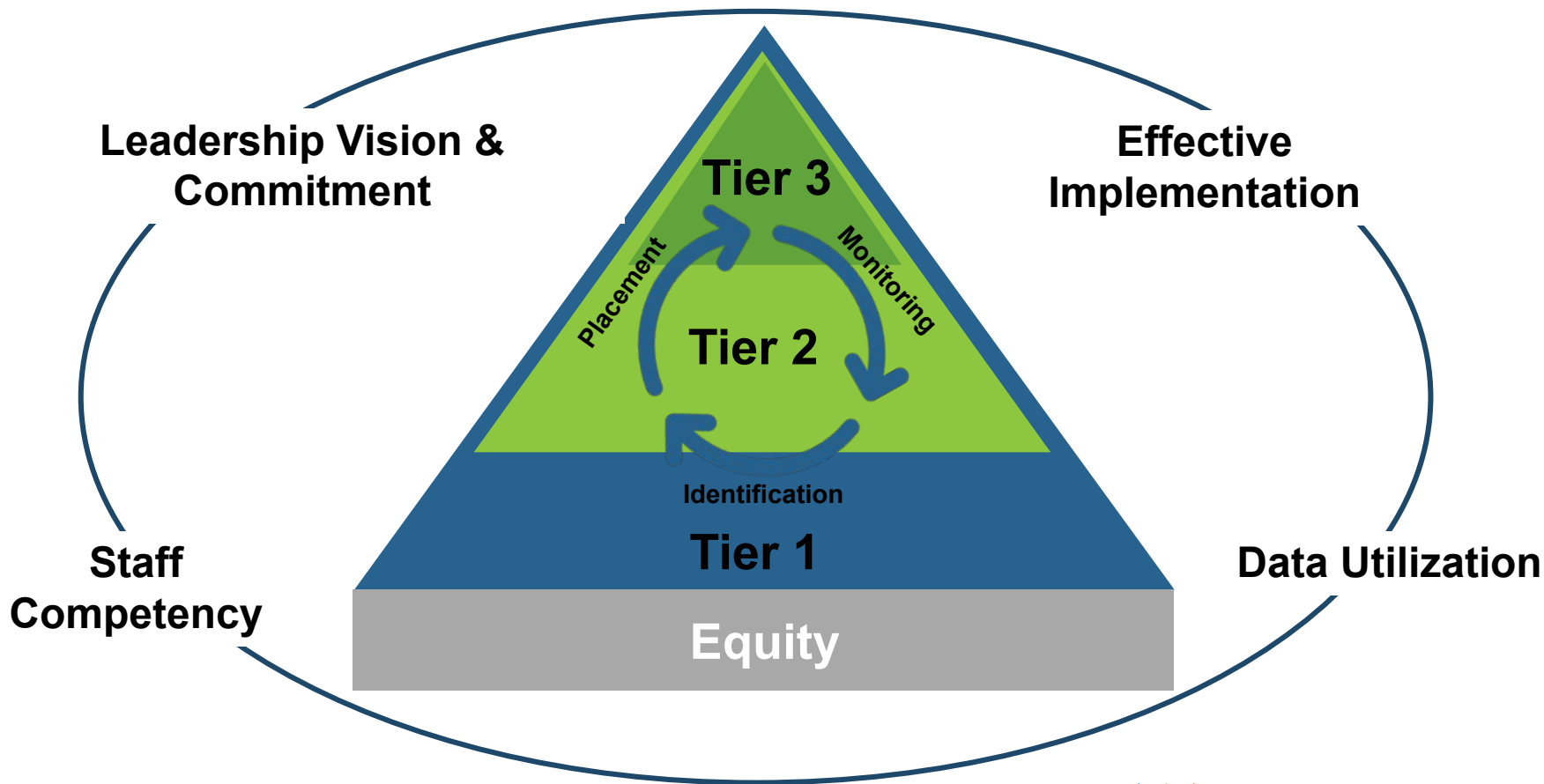
October 3, 2021
outside 3 Moore St



October 3, 2021
outside 3 Moore St



Multi-Tiered System of Support for SEL & Mental Health



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL,
& BEHAVIOR ACADEMY



Could there be a better way?



- Civilian alternative emergency response models are emerging across the country
- Widespread and growing public support across the city for exploring civilian AER models
- Somerville City departments/agencies have started to explore options

Could there be a better way?

- Somerville City Council selected AER for its short list of FY2023 budget priorities:



**City of Somerville
Massachusetts**

**Agenda Item
213471**

Approved.
Apr 14, 2022 7:00 PM

That the FY 2023 Budget include meaningful investment towards establishing non-police first responder programs for non-criminal emergencies.

The need is here in Somerville—and the time for action is now!

Current Emergent Behavioral Health Response Systems in Somerville



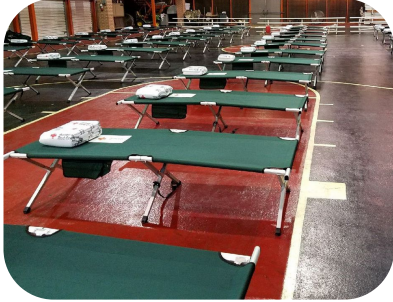
Current Supports:

- Statewide Community Behavioral Health Clinic/ Emergency Services Program (ESP)
 - Cambridge/Somerville Emergency Services (CSES)
- 988 calls directed to Samaritans
 - Screened calls directed to CSES
- 911 calls to dispatch
 - Where are these calls directed?

What do Somerville residents want for emergency response services?



Ways to support the health of Somerville's most vulnerable members in the short-term:



**Warming/Resource
Centers**



**Safe Consumption
Site (SCS)**



**Increased Community Education
of Existing Resources**

What Could Alternative Emergency Response in Somerville Look Like?

A Range of Alternative Emergency Response Models:



- Fully embedded departments or divisions
- Fully autonomous organizations
- Quasi-autonomous organizations

Important facets of true Alternative Emergency Response:

- Seek to limit mandated reporting
- Non-police control of dispatch
- Confidentiality and security with data
- Responders share lived experience and identities to those being supported
- Respect, self-determination, and choice



Vision for Alternative Public Safety In Somerville:

- Anti-racism, anti-oppressive practice, disability & transformative justice
- Preventative Care-Crisis Response-Aftercare
- Fluid and uniquely-tailored to needs of people reaching out for support
- Considers intersectional nature of crisis

An expansive view of AER might include: mutual aid for access to material resources, wellness checks, crisis counseling, grief and loss counseling, family or community disputes, substance misuse, addressing needs of unhoused people, connections to resources & referrals, transporting individuals to care facilities, first aid and non-emergency medical care, respite space



Somerville Deserves A True Alternative And We Need To Start Now!

- There is no perfect model for Somerville
- We need to start now, but balance urgency with deliberate and intentional action
- The process needs to be iterative and flexible
- Impacted communities must be engaged as experts and partners in creation, implementation, and assessment:
 - BIPOC, low- and no-income, disabled , neurodivergent, LGBTQIA+, immigrant (including undocumented), criminalized, houseless communities
- We need adequate, multi-year funding which will ultimately save the City money

“You can’t have public safety without the public”- Dream Defenders, Miami