



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CITY COUNCIL

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CITY COUNCILOR AT LARGE

**Conveying budget priorities on the creation of an alternative emergency response, in response to Item 23-0159, Mayor's Request for input on priorities for the FY 2024 Budget.**

**1. Project description**

This proposal outlines the creation of a non-police emergency response under the department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The first year budget of \$1.4 million dollars is for the establishment of the division within HHS and based on the creation of similar divisions and current costs in the city. Establishment of the division will need a consultant to assess needs, along with hiring a Director and hiring of subsequent staff for responders and administrative work. After the initial year, an evaluation will be done to assess the ongoing needs of the division and the community at large.

**2. Project justification:**

In the three years since the racial justice uprising that locally and nationally called for shifting the focus of community safety efforts away from solely policing, we have had hours of city-led discussions, webinars, presentations from experts, and more. However, no structural change has yet occurred since thousands of residents called on the City of Somerville to invest in non-lethal, life-affirming alternatives. In the wake of the police murder of Somerville High School graduate Sayed Arif Faisal, it is clear that every day that passes without systemic, structural change is another day that the most vulnerable in our community are forced to call the police for an emergency that does not require an armed response.

This proposal outlines a clear and manageable process for implementing the first phase of an alternative emergency response. Residents continue to identify the need for alternative public safety methods, however without initiating any form of new alternative emergency response our residents will have to continue relying on services that do not match their needs. Whether it's responding to overdoses or driving unhoused residents to warming shelters during freezing cold nights, these calls for assistance do not require a weapon. These types of

interactions instead require community members with lived experience, compassion, and trust with said community members to show up in their vulnerable hours of need.

Dozens of cities and towns across Massachusetts and around the US have fully operational alternative emergency response teams in their communities. Every day Somerville does not implement something similar, we fall behind. Best practices from these communities include:

- Training community members who have a lifetime of relevant experience
- Building trust with community members who may not be comfortable with police
- Creating resources by and for people who are impacted by the criminal legal system such as: BIPOC, low- and no-income, disabled, neurodivergent, LGBTQIA+, immigrant (including undocumented), formerly incarcerated, and unhoused communities
- Using approaches demonstrated to produce the best outcomes for residents' safety and wellbeing

Having this division seated in HHS allows for the community, especially members with a fear of and lived experience with policing, to seek assistance. Many of the types of calls that come in are public health issues such as responding to overdoses, reaching out to people experiencing homelessness, people who are experiencing a mental health crisis, and people needing interpersonal conflict mediation.

### **3. Detailed timeline**

The following timeline is based on other municipalities' implementation of Alternative Emergency Response systems as well as the creation of the City's newer departments. This timeline is subject to change based on needs of the vendor and hiring process for staff which will affect when and how frequently calls can be answered.

- 1) Identifying and hiring a consultant to assist in creating AER structure for three (3) months.
- 2) Hiring Director for the division - one (1) to two (2) months.
- 3) Begin building out the division by hiring and training staff - one (1) to three (3) months.
- 4) Training on standard operating procedure for the division - two (2) to three (3) months.
- 5) Initial intake of calls and services - final three (3) months of the FY.

### **4. Detailed evaluation**

Upon completion of the first year, the new division should collect the following pieces of information:

- A. Full operating procedure for division
- B. Full list of trainings provided to responders and caseworkers
- C. Cumulative de-identified spreadsheet showing:
  - a. The number of residents impacted
  - b. Types of calls for emergency alternative response
  - c. Types of resources or services provided during a call for emergency alternative response
  - d. Other city departments or office residents were connected to after a call for emergency alternative response
- D. An ongoing list of additional services and resources needed to fully address resident needs during or after a call for emergency alternative response

## 5. Estimated budget

<u>Cost</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>How Calculated</u>
\$50k	For program design costs operating procedure, rules, guidelines and documents for program set up	Based on comparable consulted contracts for program creation in newly created office, departments, and divisions
\$900k	Emergency response personnel  Director of EARS x1 \$121,000  Admin support x1 \$83,000  Responders x8 \$66,000x8=\$528,000	Based on Lynn, Massachusetts unarmed crisis response.  Emergency Alternative Response Somerville (EARS) will be operating 8 hours a day 7 days a week with 10 staff members, including 1 director, 1 admin/support staff, 8 responders.  Costs based on similar structures in newly created offices, departments, and divisions with 20% overhead
\$300k	Mediation personnel  Case manager/supervisor x1 \$83,000	Based on Dayton, OH Mediation Center costs <a href="https://www.daytonohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/11693/Justice-Community-Service-A">https://www.daytonohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/11693/Justice-Community-Service-A</a>

	Caseworkers x3 \$66,000x3=\$198,000	<u>rea</u> (p55)
\$50k	Rent	Based on current leases signed with SPD for their two substations.
\$70k	Miscellaneous	Costs based on similar structures in newly created offices budgets for postage, computer and technology, office supplies, and translation

## 6. Conclusions

Residents continue to identify the need for alternative public safety methods when responding to calls for assistance that do not require a weapon. As this Council heard at the meeting of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee on February 27th, dozens of cities across Massachusetts and around the US have fully operational alternative emergency response teams in their communities. Every day that passes without systemic, structural change is another day that our city fails to provide our residents with meaningful alternatives to policing. Building out an alternative emergency response is not only possible but necessary.