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April 24, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor  
State of California

The Honorable Toni Atkins  
President pro Tempore  
California State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon  
Speaker of the Assembly  
California State Assembly

**RE: Recommendation to Establish a Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Responses**

Dear Governor Newsom, President pro Tempore Atkins, and Speaker Rendon:

I, along with the undersigned members of the California State Legislature and community based organizations (CBOs) that represent a broad coalition of advocacy groups, researchers, service and medical providers dedicated to making California's communities safer for all, respectfully urge you to establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (C.R.I.S.E.S.) Act program with an allocation of \$10 million. The transformational program will improve emergency responses for vulnerable populations in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. By strengthening, expanding and promoting community-based responses to the crisis we can leverage local community infrastructure to meet the magnitude of the moment and address the urgent needs of all Californians.

Every day, CBOs across California successfully respond to many types of emergencies that have arisen due to the pandemic. CBOs deliver food, hand-washing stations, life-saving information, psychiatric support and support for families who are sheltering-in-place in unsafe homes. Suicide hotlines in California already have received a spike in calls.

In Sacramento, Mental Health First manages a hotline for residents in need of immediate mental health intervention. COVID-19 and the resulting economic hardships of job-loss and possible homelessness have resulted in greater numbers of people reaching out for help to

prevent self-harm. After support teams address the immediate crisis, they work to strengthen the individual's support system and connect them to resources.

Organizations like Fathers and Families of San Joaquin in Stockton, which manages a Trauma Recovery Center that helps people end cycles of violence, are ensuring that people being released from incarceration are connected to housing and community support, and addressing underlying trauma through holistic, culturally rooted, healing approaches.

Despite the positive impact and the cost savings that community-oriented responses to emergencies present, California has done little to support and scale these efforts. Instead, law enforcement officers continue to respond to situations better suited for response from community organizations with trained peer support experts, mental health providers or crisis counselors. CBOs have the expertise, relationships and networks to meet the needs of their community.

In many instances, involvement by law enforcement officers increases the threat of feeling unsafe, risk of arrest or deportation, harm to the individual experiencing the crisis and unnecessary costs including the time spent by the responding officers. The presence of armed officers can escalate a crisis – increasing risk for everyone. In worst-case scenarios, officers use force to respond to a person in crisis, resulting in unjust deaths and serious bodily injury to those who simply need the care and support of trained professionals.


Establishing a program to fill the void in emergency response services is critical for Black people, Indigenous people, Latinx people, people with disabilities, people who are trans or gender nonconforming, people who are formerly incarcerated, people with immigration status issues and people who are unhoused or homeless. These vulnerable groups face disproportionate police contact or an increased likelihood of police violence. These groups need access to quality emergency services that are culturally appropriate and from trained professionals with record of service in their communities.

Intimate partner violence is a frightening reality for millions of Californians and COVID-19 has heightened the risk-factors for violence (economic stress, isolation, exposure to violence) and diminished protective factors (social cohesion, connection, and access to services). Throughout California, families sheltering in place are cut off from school, work and friends – these support systems often are lifelines for people who are subjected to abuse. Communities across the world are addressing a surge in partner violence during COVID-19 and in California, initial reports indicate there is an urgent unmet need for support. The Fresno County Sheriff's office experienced a 77 percent increase in domestic violence reports in April. And yet, research shows about half of all instances of intimate partner violence go unreported to the police. For survivors who do call the police, about 75 percent said police involvement had no impact or left them less safe. For decades, community-based organizations have provided a lifeline to survivors and essential engagement of those at-risk of causing harm. Bolstering these efforts during the COVID-19 public health crisis will save lives and prevent generations of trauma.

By ensuring the involvement of community organizations with a deeper knowledge and understanding of the issues, people and relationships involved in the emergency, we can enable more effective, cost-efficient support to people in crisis.

While a wide variety of innovative community organizations successfully are meeting the needs of vulnerable populations in emergency situations, California does not have a policy, a set of protocols or dedicated funding to support and strengthen community organizations' involvement. Therefore, we must move swiftly and judiciously to protect our communities. Thank you for your consideration of this critical emergency response program. Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (916) 319-2054.

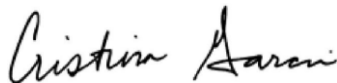
Sincerely,




Sydney Kamlager  
Assemblymember, District 54



Rob Bonta  
Assemblymember, District 18



Cristina Garcia  
Assemblymember, District 58



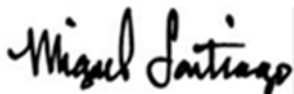
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Assemblymember, District 53



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Oakland Punks with Lunch -Community Outreach Harm Reduction Team  
People Linking Art, Community, and Ecology  
PolicyLink  
Public Health Advocates  
Public Health Justice Collective  
Riverside Temple Beth El  
Roots Community Health Center  
Rubicon Programs  
STOP Coalition  
SURJ San Francisco  
The Black Organizing Project  
The End Police Violence Collective  
The Wharton School  
Transgender, Gender-Variant, & Intersex Justice Project  
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Youth Justice Coalition