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**MAYOR EMANUEL, OEMC ANNOUNCE SIGNIFICANT GAINS IN FIRST-RESPONSE
SERVICE FOR MENTAL HEALTH RELATED INCIDENTS**

*New community-based pilot will help residents better engage with first-responders
and connect them with free mental health and crisis intervention awareness training*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) today announced significant gains in mental health awareness, training and response. Call takers and dispatchers at the City's 911 Center are successfully identifying calls needing a Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) certified response by the Chicago Police Department (CPD). Since the new eight-hour mental health training was rolled out earlier this year, more than 425 OEMC staff received the training which has resulted in better recognition and increased dispatch of CIT trained officers.

"Last January, I announced comprehensive reforms to address how first responders can best serve individuals with mental illness," said Mayor Emanuel. "As part of these efforts, I convened the Mental Health Steering Committee to take a holistic look at all aspects of the response – from policies and training of 911 call takers and dispatchers, to police training and de-escalation tactics and service delivery. With this milestone, we are ensuring that every aspect of the City's first-response efforts are effective and meeting the needs of individuals who may be experiencing a mental health crisis."

Often a caller to 911 does not expressly identify an incident as being mental health related. Absent such information, it can be difficult for 911 to know to dispatch CIT-certified officers. To better equip call takers and dispatchers to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis and dispatch the proper resources, OEMC implemented an eight-hour awareness and de-escalation training for call takers, dispatchers and those 311 call takers who supplement 911 staffing when there is unusually high call volume.

“In most cases, 911 call takers and dispatchers are the front line of emergency response, and we want to ensure that we are delivering the highest quality service both to the residents and first responders we serve,” said OEMC Executive Director Alicia-Tate Nadeau. “This training gives our 911 Operations staff the tools they need to help identify a mental health related call and ensure the proper resources are dispatched to help individuals with mental illness.”

While one of the main goals of the training is to get the correct CIT trained resources to a person in need, the first step in that process is correctly identifying those 911 calls that warrant a CIT trained officer response. As a result of the heightened sense of awareness, the total number of CIT identified calls has grown and appropriate CIT resources are being dispatched in much higher volume. As a result of the new training and enhancements to the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, as of October 2016, there were over 20,345 CIT identified events, almost 5 times the, 5,560 911 CIT identified events in 2015. Through October of 2016, 13,258 CIT identified events were responded to by CIT trained officers, up from just 2,938 over that same period in 2015.

These improvements are part of the comprehensive reforms to enhance first-responders ability to provide appropriate and competent understanding, service and care for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. The training of 911 staff is complemented by the efforts of CPD as it simultaneously works to increase its number of officers certified in CIT.

The training curriculum, developed by OEMC along with CPD and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Chicago, is an important step forward in improving the City’s overall mental health response system. In an effort to better inform the training and curriculum, all 911 training staff members and 911 supervisors completed CPD’s 40-hour CIT course prior to developing the new module specifically for telecommunicators. The training includes an overview of CPD’s Crisis Intervention Training, group activities to review example calls needing CIT response, methods to communicate with callers experiencing a mental health crisis to better de-escalate the situation for both the caller and first responders arriving the scene, role playing scenarios to simulate CIT calls, and review of CPD and OEMC’s policies regarding mental health related responses.

“OEMC’s leadership in developing, implementing and completing their first full day mental health awareness training is incredibly meaningful,” said Alexa James, executive director of NAMI Chicago. “OEMC call takers and dispatchers have an incredibly challenging job. Providing additional tools, strategies and skills to better understand crisis calls allows the responding officer to better prepare in responding to the call. Further, this training is initiating a cultural shift where customer service and support for callers that may be experiencing a mental health crisis is improving. We know this is a huge step in reducing further tragedy.”

The Kennedy Forum, NAMI Chicago and Chicago Department of Public Health have developed a program to provide education on the existence and purpose of CIT-certified officers, call takers and dispatchers. The pilot will kick off in January on the West Side, and brings together Catholic Charities, Presence Health and Sinai Hospital, among others, with local police command staff and OEMC’s 911 staff to train at least 400 individuals from local schools, faith-based institutions and community-based organizations. The goal is to help residents better identify the signs and symptoms of individuals experiencing mental health or addiction issues, inform them where they can find help in their community, and how to contact a CIT-trained officer. Over the next few months, the program will educate members of the community about available resources and how to access them and register community members with free mental health and CIT awareness training. The City has partnered with the University of Illinois – Chicago to conduct a Institutional Review Board approved evaluation of the training’s impact and reach.

“The Chicago Police Department and OEMC have taken good concrete action to ensure our City’s first responders have the training and support they need to better serve individuals who may have mental health challenges,” said Kelly O'Brien, executive director of The Kennedy Forum Illinois. “We have more to do, but this is progress we should recognize. This is going to take all of us - including the community. Towards that end, we are spearheading a community outreach project to increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of mental illness, available services, and the existence and purpose of CIT-trained officers.”

Moving forward, the 911 training staff will continue to partner with NAMI Chicago to reinforce important aspects of the training at roll calls.

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