

## EDITORIALS &amp; OPINIONS

The Bulletin  
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# Reimagining policing needs flexibility in funds

It's not fair to ask police to do things they are poorly equipped for. Rushing out to a 911 call about a suicidal subject with police is much better than nothing.

But if you were to reimagine public safety, it's easy to imagine the better response for that call and many others would be to send a team that includes a trained mental health professional.

The Bend Police Department already has a community response team that includes a mental health clinician who goes with police on some calls. Deschutes County has a Mobile Crisis Assessment Team, or MCAT, made up of mental health workers who can respond to crises. And there's also some very encouraging news about MCAT, as The Bulletin's Garrett Andrews reported in Thursday's paper. MCAT is going to pilot a program to have it respond to 911 calls from suicidal subjects. County 911 gets about three of those calls a day. If it works, it could be expanded to include other kinds of calls.

Reimagining policing also involves reimagining funding for public safety. The state grant to enable Bend's program was for five years. We would hate to see that program end. And if MCAT is going to expand, that will take money, too, perhaps \$300,000 a year.

House Bill 2417 could be key. It's a bill to provide \$10 million in matching grants to cities and counties to do the type of work Bend's program and MCAT can do. But as originally written, the bill would not have done much good for Central Oregon. It was written narrowly to promote the CAHOOTS model in Eugene.

The CAHOOTS program deservedly has been in the national spotlight as one model of using a team to be the first responders to people in crisis because of mental health, homelessness and addiction. It uses a medic and a crisis worker with mental health training. Not police.

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And it works.

But HB 2417 specified that the grants were for teams that included a nurse or emergency medical services provider and a crisis worker. That is the CAHOOTS model. Bend's program would not qualify. MCAT's team would not, either.

The bill also required that to qualify for grant funding that a city or county must have a sobering facility, one shelter facility for every 65,000 residents, one crisis respite center and law enforcement willing to help — or equivalent services. That could mean many communities across the state would not be eligible for grants, including Bend and Deschutes County.

The bill was amended in early April to be more broad. But it doesn't appear as if either Bend's program or the MCAT program would qualify, at least as they are currently set up. The city and the county should not have to set up completely new programs. The grants should enable them to build on what they already achieved, not start over or compel them to incorporate something new into their already excellent work.

HB 2417 is due for some more reimagining in the Legislature.

# Change in water rights feels wrong to some

Oregon's water law is — on one level — about who was first. So when there is not enough water for everyone to get their water right, people who have more senior water rights get first dibs.

They can make a "call" to receive water. Users with junior water rights get shut off until senior water rights are satisfied, as the issue was summed up for legislators.

The law now allows an automatic stay, enabling junior water right holders to prevent their water from being shut off. As the Capital Press described, that's been an issue for the

Klamath Tribes. When it has issued a call, by the time the litigation is resolved the irrigation season is over. Junior water rights holders have been able to get their water.

House Bill 2244 as amended would speed up the process of resolving the automatic stay in narrowly written circumstances.

This bill has been a debate about Oregon water law. So it does not satisfy everyone. For instance, some farmers are worried it may hurt their ability to irrigate. And it may, but it seems to be on track to pass the Legislature.



# Embrace the community responder model

BY DEBBIE RAMSEY

Special to The Washington Post

When I served the Baltimore Police Department, I performed a lot of unexpected jobs. A parent once called emergency services because the school crossing guard did not show up to work, so I filled in for the morning. Another time, I was an animal control officer, because a squirrel had found its way into a man's basement. I also once acted as a utility company representative when a woman was alarmed about her power being turned off. And I can't count the times I was sent to manage people living on the street and was expected to fill the role of social worker.

I managed to perform most of these jobs reasonably well, and the residents of my city were grateful. But none of these situations required a police response. Every time I took one of these calls, I was "out of service," meaning that the department could not send me to investigate serious, violent crimes.

What's more, police are not better situated than anyone else to handle these calls. In fact, we're often worse. Having an armed officer show up to nonviolent, non-urgent situations is bad practice because an officer's presence alone may be enough to escalate a problem unnecessarily. And the burden of this risk falls on some of our most vulnerable neighbors and loved ones: People with untreated mental illnesses are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than the average civilian.

What we really need to respond effectively to each call are community responders.

Under the community responder model, 911 operators direct behav-

ioral health calls to a team of unarmed professionals such as social workers, mental health professionals, mediators and "credible messengers" — people with strong local ties, usually those who have overcome the same issues facing their clients.

A recent report titled "The Community Responder Model: How Cities Can Send the Right Responder to Every 911 Call," co-authored by the Law Enforcement Action Partnership and the Center for American Progress, makes the case for this new approach.

Researchers analyzed 911 call data from eight large cities, finding that the majority of emergency calls were low- or medium-priority safety issues — those related to low-risk mental health, drugs and homelessness and other quality-of-life and administrative complaints, such as neighbor disputes and minor traffic accidents. Researchers concluded that many of these calls could be safely diverted from police to people who were better suited to prevent and respond to crime.

The Law Enforcement Action Partnership and the Center for American Progress estimate that community responders could address 21% to 38% of police calls for service, while an additional 13% to 33% could be handled behind the scenes and with proper call screening. The CR model has great potential to ease tensions between police and civilians, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color that are over-policed for minor issues and under-policed for serious crimes.

With more police resources available, officers could focus on building trust with community members. And without the distraction of every non-criminal nuisance and quality-of-life issue in our precincts, we would have

the capacity to more thoroughly investigate violence and make arrests that take predators off the street.

The CR model would be perfect in my home city of Baltimore. There's a perception that Baltimore's violence is beyond fixing and that not enough people are doing anything about it, but our residents care deeply. They do not trust police to create safer streets, and public resources are scant.

I'm the founder and executive director of Unified Efforts, a community nonprofit that provides children with peaceable solutions to local problems. We train the next generation to handle serious neighborhood issues like gang disputes, as well as everyday matters like squirrels in basements and missing crossing guards at schools. If Baltimore had a CR program, the young people served by Unified Efforts could go to school for social work, train as community responders and get meaningful employment.

There is no single magic solution that will repair police relationships in our communities, and no single solution for reducing crime. But I am confident in the community responder model because the evidence shows that the appropriate responders for low-level crimes and noncriminal problems are not, in fact, police. The CR model creates a comprehensive health and safety service network that police, public health experts and community members can all get behind.

■ *Debbie Ramsey served for 12 years with the Baltimore Police Department, retiring as a detective. She is the founder and executive director of Unified Efforts, an organization that engages youth in conflict resolution, and a representative of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges and other law-enforcement officials working to improve the criminal justice system.*

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We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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# As satellites proliferate in orbit, telescopes go dark

BY ADAM MINTER

Bloomberg

For millennia, humans have peered into the night sky hoping to divine their place in the universe. Telescopes and other technologies allowed them to look ever deeper. Now that age-old custom is running up against a very modern threat: satellites.

More than 3,300 operational satellites are in orbit, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. As global demand for broadband and other services soars, that number could exceed 100,000 in the years ahead. This has scientists worried: Satellites reflect sunlight, causing bright trails across the night sky, which in turn can impede crucial observations or corrupt astronomical data.

Without government action, the

rise of satellite constellations could soon make ground-based telescopes all but unusable — affecting everything from the study of the stars to the search for dangerous near-Earth objects.

Astronomers have long had a fraught relationship with technology. Tensions date to the 19th-century gas lamp. Cheap lights improved public safety, enabled factories to keep longer hours and allowed for the emergence of nightlife. But by the mid-1800s, big cities were so well lit (and so polluted) that astronomers were losing sight of the dimmest stars. In response, they tended to decamp for remoter pastures. When the countryside lit up, too, they pushed out to the world's last dark places, such as the remote deserts of northern Chile.

Even those outposts weren't entirely free from interference, and research-

ers had to learn to filter out (for example) radio and television signals. But bigger telescopes and better technology still allowed them to scan the cosmos effectively.

In 1997, Motorola Solutions Inc. made that task more difficult when it launched the first of dozens of communication satellites in a "constellation" around the Earth. Now operated by Iridium Communications Inc., the array provides global voice and data coverage. But its powerful transmitters also interfere with the bands of radio spectrum allocated (under international agreement) to scientific instruments like telescopes. That interference is growing worse every year, as more and more satellites come online.

SpaceX has already launched more than 1,300 satellites for its broadband network, called Starlink, and has been authorized to send up nearly 12,000

in total. OneWeb plans to have some 7,000 in orbit in the next few years, while Amazon.com Inc. wants to launch 3,236. Meanwhile, China is preparing for two constellations with a combined 12,992 satellites.

Last year, dozens of researchers from around the world met virtually to study the risks these launches pose. Results are being presented this week at the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space at the United Nations. Their conclusions are grim: "The situation for astronomy is reaching a point of no return from continuous interference with observations and loss of science."

Fortunately, SpaceX and OneWeb have publicly recognized these dangers. SpaceX, in particular, is working with astronomers to "darken" its satellites so that they have less impact on observatories. But even if both com-

panies devise reasonable solutions, there's no assurance that their competitors (public and private) will do the same.

As a start, bodies such as the UN should be raising the alarm and studying possible solutions to this problem. Existing agreements for divvying up radio frequencies could be a starting point for new talks on mitigating satellite risks. Governments should also create satellite-licensing agreements that require companies to protect essential scientific efforts. And operators should follow SpaceX's lead in reaching out to scientists and incorporating their needs into technology designs.

There's no going back to the dark nights of our ancestors. But with some foresight, policymakers should be able to ensure clearer skies into the future.

■ *Adam Minter is a Bloomberg columnist.*