

Public Safety For All Task Force

*Recommendations
Info Sheet*



Mayor
Katjana Ballantyne

DEPARTMENT OF
**RACIAL &
SOCIAL JUSTICE**

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MA

Who is on the Task Force

The Public Safety for All Task Force is a group of 20 people who have been brought together by Mayor Ballantyne to make policy recommendations on how to better design public safety systems in Somerville. The Task Force includes community members, elected officials, City employees, and experts in public safety.

What did the Task Force do?

The Task Force reviewed findings from the Public Safety for All Survey, engaged the community through public events, and reviewed data on patterns in police calls for service in Somerville. Task Force members have also researched various public safety response models in cities across the country and met with leaders from other cities to understand their approaches.

Why was the Task Force created?

The Task Force was created with one goal in mind: providing community members with the data, support and expertise to put forward tailored public safety recommendations that make Somerville a safer place to live and work. The results of the Public Safety for All (PSFA) Survey were the starting point for this work. Task Force members specifically looked at alternative response, co-response, and hybrid response models. The Department of Racial and Social Justice designed the PSFA Survey to collect feedback from community members relating to their perceptions of policing and public safety in the City of Somerville. The PSFA Survey ran from September 2022 to March 2023

TERMINOLOGY

- **Co-Response Model** – A co-responder is a mental health professional or service provider who responds to calls for service with a police officer. The Co-Response Model employs this approach with the goal of reducing harm and providing alternatives to arrest, especially for calls involving people experiencing a mental health crisis or homelessness
- **The Community Outreach, Help and Recovery (COHR)** – is Somerville Police Department's in-house program. COHR was created to assist with assessment, referral, alternative to arrest, as well as pre- and post-adjudication planning for individuals impacted by behavioral health.
- **Body-Worn Camera** – Small devices that law enforcement officers wear on their chest or head to record audio, video, or photographic interactions with the public.
- **Public Safety for All** – is a multi-tiered, community-driven initiative to create and shape public safety policies and engagement that advances racial and social justice across all economic classes, ages, genders, races, ethnicities, and identities
- **Civil Service** – The Civil Service Unit strives to recruit a qualified diverse labor force and evaluate current and potential employees who want to work in public safety, to fill jobs in agencies and communities across Massachusetts.
- **Emergency Response** – An immediate, systematic response to a crisis. The goal of any emergency response system is to reduce the impact of a crisis on the community.
- **Crisis Response Team** – A team of individuals that respond when someone has a mental health or substance use disorder crisis. These teams are often made up of community members.
- **Aftercare** – The last stage of an emergency response system. A plan is designed to meet the needs of a person or people who experienced a crisis.
- **Wellness Check** – A wellness check is an in-person visit from one or more law enforcement officers or other public safety providers. Oftentimes, a wellness check takes place because of a request from a friend or family member who is worried about the person.
- **Deescalation Training** – Deescalation training teaches people ways to prevent physical violence. Individuals being trained will learn how to use communication and other techniques to calm or reduce the intensity of a potentially violent situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a summary of our main recommendations:

Recommendations for alternative responders in Somerville:

- **Co-Response Model:** Adopt a co-response model staffed by clinicians and mental health specialists, building off its existing Community Outreach, Help and Recovery (COHR) program.
 - The co-response program will need support through staffing of SPD officers.
 - The standard co-response model would allow for clinicians to ride in police cars alongside police officers when responding to calls.
- **Civil service and bid reform:** Somerville should consider eliminating the civil service and bid reform processes so that it can assign officers to positions based on strengths and to encourage hires of officers of diverse backgrounds and skillsets.
- **Body-Worn Cameras:** Implement body-worn cameras and allow for footage to be reviewed by COHR.
- **Civilians in SPD:** The City should consider civilian roles in property crimes investigation to better serve the expressed needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.
- **Training for SPD:** Somerville is a regional hub for training and technical assistance for Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. Somerville can build on this by aiming to have 100% of SPD officers trained to the highest level and by providing more training in procedural justice. In addition, the City should consider adding Active Bystander Training (ABLE) which guides agencies and communities on the concrete measures that must be in place to create and sustain a culture of peer intervention.