

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1197

**TITLE: Resolution Advocating for the Expansion of the University of Florida
Police Department Mental Health Correspondent Program**

**AUTHOR(S): Majority Party Leader Julia Seifer, Senator Marian Enriquez,
Senator Christian Jubran, Senator Zachary Arzt**

SPONSOR(S): Senator Aditi Sarkar

WHEREAS, the University of Florida Police Department implemented a Mental Health Correspondent program, as of June, 2022, which involves a crisis intervention team trained officer and mental health crisis worker accompanying police officers dispatched to calls pertaining to mental health and mental health crises [1]; and,

WHEREAS, by responding to calls together, “where the assistance of a trained mental health clinician could be helpful for a person experiencing distress or having a mental health crisis,” this program effectively communicates and deescalates situations while connecting individuals affected to ongoing resources [1]; and,

WHEREAS, this also aids in the University of Florida Police Department’s commitment to ensuring safety on campus by exploring alternatives to mental health hospitalization [1], which can be extremely harmful, especially in a youth population, when carried out by police officers [2]; and,

WHEREAS, in a psychiatric study of the young adult experience of police involvement during initiation of involuntary psychiatric holds and transport, “a majority of participants reported negative experiences; major themes characterizing negative encounters were the framing of distress as criminal or of intervention as disciplinary rather than therapeutic, perceived aggression and callousness from police officers, and poor communication” [2]; and,

WHEREAS, the American Psychological Associations reported that as of October 2022, student mental health is worsening, and “campuses are rethinking their approach” to mental health. “Amid massive increases in demand for care, psychologists are helping colleges and universities embrace a broader culture of well-being and better equipping faculty to support students in need” [3], thus increasing the urgency for this police department initiative;

WHEREAS, the University of Florida has spearheaded this initiative, being “the first campus police department in the country” to launch this program with specific efforts to add “improved and more immediate responses to crisis situations, the ability to follow up with individuals and

family members after a crisis to reduce the likelihood of further crisis situations, decrease expensive arrests and jail admissions for individuals in behavioral health crisis, and reduce potentially unnecessary psychiatric hospitalizations due to the ability to provide more accurate on-scene assessments” [4]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida Police Department hired an experienced clinician to launch this program, providing clinical and administrative oversight simultaneously. The clinicians in this program will furthermore be Master’s level clinicians and have a background in crisis intervention [4]; and,

WHEREAS, clinicians in this program will respond with an officer from Monday through Friday, from 10am to 6pm. Search efforts are currently hoping to find a second clinician to “respond with an officer Tuesday-Saturday, 5pm-1am... to ensure that peak behavioral health call hours are covered” [4]; and,

WHEREAS, while this program is proven to be effective, mental health crises can occur at any time at the University of Florida, and it is essential to have a mental health professional accompany police officers when they respond to any type of call related to mental health; and,

WHEREAS, in order to guarantee that a mental health professional is on-call at all times, it is essential to guarantee proper resources for the University of Florida Police Department to be put toward expanding their co-responder program; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes the need to take active steps toward improving the safety of, and mental health resources for, all students; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes the effectiveness of the University of Florida Police Department’s co-responder program and wishes to see its further development and expansion to increase hours and quantity of mental health professionals available at all times.

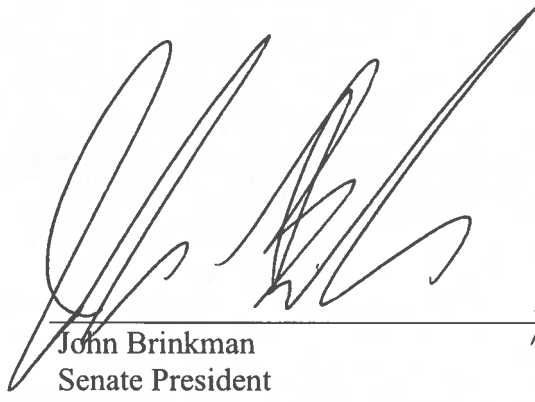
Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to University of Florida President Ben Sasse, Vice President of Student Life Heather White, Associate Director of the University of Florida Police Department Administrative Services Division Ed Posey, University of Florida Police Department Training Commander Lieutenant Scott Silver, Members of the Co-Respondent Training Team Meggen Sixbey, Tiffany Bellesi, Alex Wanzenberg, Claudia Espinosa, Bradley Michaels Roberts, Frank Zyskowski, Devin Burgoyne, Joshua Jablanski, Matthew Garcia, Delfino Moncivais, Student Body President Olivia Green, Student Body Vice President Clara Calavia, and Student Body Treasurer Nyla Pierre.

[1] <https://police.ufl.edu/divisions/behavioral-services/co-responder-team/>

[2] <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.202100263>

[3] <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>

[4] <https://police.ufl.edu/divisions/behavioral-services/co-responder-team/co-responder-model/>

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long, sweeping stroke that extends upwards and to the right.

John Brinkman
Senate President

3/1/2024
Date