

Lake County Sheriff's Office

John D. Idleburg, Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE



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For Immediate Release

Seven Lake County Law-Enforcement Agencies Partnering to Better Respond to Mental Health Calls

Sheriff John D. Idleburg is excited to announce a new pilot multi-agency collaborative initiative in responding to mental health-related calls for service.

Gurnee Police Department, Lake Forest Police Department, Libertyville Police Department, Lincolnshire Police Department, Mundelein Police Department, Vernon Hills Police Department, and the Lake County Sheriff's Office are partnering to participate in a co-responder model for mental health related calls.

Members of the partner agencies have been working together throughout 2021 to establish operational procedures for the pilot initiative. The program will be an expansion of the Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COaST) already in place at the sheriff's office. This new co-responder approach is modeled after Orange County's (FL) Behavior Response Unit, with modifications to meet the needs and structures suitable for Lake County.

This new expansion of COaST will feature a social worker, clinician, or peer specialist who will be partnered with a sheriff's deputy or police officer from a partner agency. The Sheriff's Office will have a full-time deputy and mental health worker assigned as one team. The other team will be a rotation of officers from the member agencies, and those officers will be partnered with a separate mental health worker.

The teams will respond to mental-health calls in areas normally patrolled by the sheriff's office, and in Gurnee, Lake

Forest, Libertyville, Lincolnshire, Mundelein, and Vernon Hills. When not on the scene of a call in one of these areas, the teams will conduct follow-up with those who had a previous law-enforcement encounter, where the police officer believes mental health was a factor of the interaction.

The co-responder teams will have a wide-range of options when interacting with an individual who is in mental crisis. These options will range from being a bridge to connect the individual with future professional assistance, providing the person with a ride to the Independence Center Living Room Wellness Center, or providing a ride to a hospital if the situation necessitates immediate professional care.

While this team is not a replacement of normal police operations, it will provide added benefits for the partner law-enforcement agencies when responding to calls involving someone in mental crisis. The teams will have the ability for the mental health worker to use as much time as needed to stabilize situations and take necessary actions to best address mental health crises.

Lake County Sheriff John D. Idleburg said, “This groundbreaking initiative with our municipal partners will provide Lake County’s law-enforcement with significant resources when responding to mental health related calls. Having a social worker or clinician on-scene, aiding in de-escalation, and the mental wellness follow-up process is an incredible new method that is bound to have successful results. I am thankful for the leadership of everyone involved in the creation of this pilot program and I look forward to adding additional municipal partners in the years to come.”

Gurnee Chief of Police Brian Smith said, “The Gurnee Police Department is honored to partner with these agencies, to build upon the program established by the Lake County Sheriff’s Office. This collaborative effort by our agencies, reflects the emerging needs within our communities and rises to the expectations of care for people in a mental health crisis. Gurnee Officers remain dedicated to providing an appropriate response that is more efficient and accessible in safely providing this care for the residents of Gurnee and Lake County.”

Lake Forest Chief of Police Karl Walldorf said, “Collaboration and law-enforcement working together to address community issues is a great method to lead to successful outcomes. I am confident this new local approach to responding to mental health crisis situations in Lake County will eventually be able to be replicated anywhere in the country. The Lake Forest Police Department is proud to participate in this cutting-edge method.”

Libertyville Chief of Police Ed Roncone said, “The Libertyville Police Department believes this partnership is a positive step forward towards addressing mental health needs within Libertyville and our partner communities within Lake County. By combining resources, the member law-enforcement agencies will work together to provide additional resources and support systems. Our officers remain committed to providing support to our communities during mental health related calls. This new coalition will provide additional opportunities for our officers to support our communities and call upon trained professionals to assist individuals during mental health related calls. We look forward to developing a collaborative relationship with the COaST team.”

Lincolnshire Chief of Police Joseph Leonas said, “The Lincolnshire Police Department remains committed to exploring new and creative opportunities to provide enhanced, quality mental health services in Lincolnshire and throughout Lake County. The expansion of the Lake County Sheriff’s Office’s COaST program is a perfect example of intergovernmental cooperation and ingenuity, as it provides law enforcement professionals with additional resources for an improved response to the challenges of mental health calls. Our work on this program isn’t done – this is simply the first step in developing a comprehensive mental health response program. I look forward to continuing to work with these law enforcement agencies and potential future agencies as well.”

Mundelein Chief of Police John Monahan said, “The Mundelein Police Department is proud to be a part of this pilot program which will provide extra support and resources to those with mental health needs in our communities. Mental health crisis response services are a vital part of our communities and we are proud to partner with these agencies in an effort to help people access the services they need.”

Vernon Hills Chief of Police Patrick Kreis said, “The Vernon Hills Police Department is excited to be part of this joint endeavor. Our hope is this pilot program will prove successful in finding new and effective ways of serving those in our community who need assistance.”

All of the police officers, deputies, and mental health workers participating in this program will go through advanced training in mid-January. The initiative will be fully operational on January 31, 2022. The success and operational procedures of this pilot program will be regularly evaluated. It is the hope of the partner agencies that the program will be a success and can be expanded in 2023.

End of Release

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