



CCEH COVID-19 Response Newsletter

Letter from CCEH Board Member Brian Preleski



Dear Friends,

It is difficult to ignore the prevalence of encounters between emotionally distressed individuals and police officers in Connecticut that result in death. A review of prior reports prepared concerning the use of deadly force by police reveals a number of these encounters.

For instance, in 2015, David Werblow, a 41-year-old man living in a group home for adults with mental health disabilities called 911 to request transportation to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. Mr. Werblow, who had no criminal history, had a long history of mental illness and had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. When the police arrived, Mr. Werblow exited the building and, according to police reports, "began walking away from [the officer] and into the middle of the street."

Mr. Werblow tried to enter a police cruiser but was unable to. He continued down the road, trying to enter another car and a truck. Eventually, he entered a car and refused to exit. A police officer tried to pull him out and warned that he would have to fire his Taser at Mr. Werblow. During this exchange, Mr. Werblow was tased a total of seven times and he seemed to be unaffected each time. Body camera footage revealed that the officer told Mr. Werblow to 'stop' or 'get down' at least forty times before he first deployed his taser. Other officers subsequently arrived on the scene.

Approximately four minutes after Mr. Werblow was handcuffed, an officer found that Mr. Werblow no longer had a pulse. The Chief Medical Examiner stated that the death was likely due to a combination of factors, and not solely from the Taser use. It is nonetheless clear that a man who called 911 for assistance in receiving a psychiatric evaluation was dead within an hour of asking for help.

This is not an issue unique to Connecticut. It has been estimated that an individual suffering from mental illness is sixteen times more likely than someone not suffering from mental illness to be killed during a police encounter. Given the volume of contact between emotionally distressed individuals and the police, minimizing the risk of escalation in police encounters with emotionally distressed individuals may be the most immediate and deployable strategy for reducing fatal police encounters.

Although police officers in Connecticut are required to receive training both prior to being certified and during the recertification process in handling encounters with individuals appearing to be emotionally distressed, it should be clear that more needs to be done.

I am a prosecutor by profession, having spent the last twenty-seven years of my legal career in law enforcement, and what I can tell you is that law enforcement doesn't have the answer. In the short term, police and prosecutors need to consider partnering with other stakeholders to ensure that the quantity and nature of police training in Connecticut is consistent with current best practices.

In the long term, Connecticut needs to consider different models for responding to individuals in crisis. One in ten calls for police services involve an individual with severe mental illness. We too often shift the responsibility for responding to these incidents from care providers to the police which results in contributing to the criminalization of mental illness.

One promising model is the Crisis Intervention Team that has been deployed successfully in a number of cities. While local practices vary, the common element to this approach is collaboration between the police and other stakeholders, including mental health providers. When deployed effectively, this model minimizes the risk of harm to both the emotionally distressed individual and the responding officers in addition to providing services and diverting individuals in crisis away from the criminal justice system. The good news is that Connecticut has begun to take a hard look at the issue. Section 12 of the recently passed police accountability bill establishes a task force to examine, among other things, "Police officer interactions with individuals who are individuals with a mental, intellectual or physical disability." Section 18 mandates that every police department in Connecticut evaluate the feasibility of the use of social workers to assist officers responding to calls and to further consider a regional approach. Evaluating a regional approach is especially important in Connecticut given its tradition of many small municipal departments that might otherwise find the deployment of mental health workers to be cost prohibitive.

Policy makers and law enforcement leaders in Connecticut have recognized that we need to approach this issue differently. We are in the midst of transformative change in the way law enforcement relates to a variety of social issues. If we have both the courage to change and to commit the resources needed to effectuate that change, we can make a genuine difference in the relationship between individuals suffering from mental illness and law enforcement.

Yours Truly,

Brian W. Preleski
Connecticut State's Attorney

**Annual Training Institute Conference
Registration is Now Open!**

HOUSING = JUSTICE

18th Annual Training Institute and Conference
October 5-9 | Virtual Online Event



This year's [Annual Training Institute](#) (ATI) will be a week-long virtual forum for presenters to share cutting-edge thinking on racial justice, criminal justice, and economic justice now in the face of COVID-19.

This year, we seek to explore how we can all come together to build an effective, just, and person-centered statewide response to homelessness amidst a global pandemic and with our near-term infusion of emergency resources. We will focus in particular on topics that are on everybody's minds right now, including how towns and cities respond to rising homelessness in the face of the pandemic among singles, families, youth, and unsheltered populations in towns and cities across our state.

Each day of the week-long event will feature a keynote presentation, up to six panels and workshops, and an hour-long "happy hour" featuring music, provider highlights, and voices of those with lived experience.

Please register today to reserve your spot and receive updates as we add new sessions. You can attend as many workshops as your schedule permits. This promises to be the most exciting ATI ever. Don't miss it!

[Register Now!](#)

Presenting Sponsor

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Congratulations to Sarah Fox



Congratulations to our very own Sarah Fox for receiving the 2020 Reverend Richard Schuster Advocacy Award. The Schuster award, named in honor of a lifelong Connecticut housing advocate and the first president of CCEH, "recognizes a professional or volunteer who demonstrates an outstanding commitment to raising awareness about the needs of individuals and families currently/in danger of experiencing homelessness, using either legislative or client-centered advocacy." Sarah Fox has worked in homelessness advocacy for over a decade, and during that time, she has been part of a sea change in how

Connecticut views homelessness. We are so fortunate to have her as a leader in our organization and our coalition. Congratulations to Sarah and all the other winners.

Survey on Connecticut's Homeless Response



The CT Coalition to End Homelessness is conducting a [survey](#) to understand and improve how the CT Homeless Response System engages with the communities it serves.

This brief survey is open all CT community members ages 16+ who are not currently employed by an organization that falls within the CT homeless response system. Thank you

for helping us end homelessness!

HMIS Update

HUD 2020 Data Standards are actively in development and implementation and are on target for the October 1st release. More details to follow.

Feedback Requested on Challenges in Voting



CCEH is seeking feedback on challenges clients faced in voting during the primary elections or may face in registering to vote or voting in the upcoming election along with innovative ways that you are working to register and get out the vote. If you have feedback to share on this issue, please email your comments to info@cceh.org.

Please note that CCEH's [website](#) includes specific guidance on how to make sure clients receive information on their voting rights. We are trying to figure out if there is additional guidance that would be useful to providers and clients so your input will be highly valued.

Important Information for Providers

New DOH Guidance for Shelter Operations during COVID-19

The CT Department of Housing along with the CT Department of Public Health have released this memorandum to provide updated guidance to shelters and Coordinated Access Networks on client admissions and discharges, facility management, and the delivery of services. The guidance is applicable to both non-congregate hotel settings and emergency shelters.

Please click [here](#) for further details.

HUD Guidance for CARES Act ESG Recipients

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has announced the allocation formula, amounts, and requirements for the additional \$3.96 billion in funding provided for the Emergency Solutions Grants Program (ESG) under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).

Please click [here](#) to read more.

Study Seeks Participants to Discuss Changes to Behavioral Health Services as a Result of COVID-19



The National Health Care for the Homeless Council is partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and seeking participants for a qualitative study, Assessing the Impact of Behavioral Health Issues on COVID-19 Risks and Disruptions in Behavioral Health Services among People Experiencing Homelessness during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The study aims to document any changes that may have occurred to behavioral health services as a direct result of the response to the pandemic. Providers interested in participating may complete this brief [application](#).

National Data on COVID-19 Testing at Homeless Service Sites

The [National HCH Council](#) and its standing Research Committee have partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to collect data from universal testing events at shelter or encampment-based service sites during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please click [here](#) to get detailed information on your State's testing efforts.

Citing COVID-19 Risks of Housing Loss, CDC Issues National Order Halting Evictions Through December 2020

On September 4, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a broad sweeping [national order halting evictions](#). Unlike prior federal and state eviction orders and actions, this order applies to all landlords—public and private, subsidized and unsubsidized—and prohibits landlords from evicting tenants through December 31, 2020. Citing the importance of housing as a protective factor for reducing the transmission of COVID-19 and the dual risks of increasing shelter populations and unsheltered homelessness, the CDC order represents one of the most significant recognitions by any federal agency of the role of housing in public health.

The order does not, however, provide for any rent relief and makes clear that renters will continue to be charged rent and may also be subject to additional fees, penalties, or interest. CCEH therefore agrees with the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) and other national advocates that "while an eviction moratorium is an essential step, it is a half-measure that extends a financial cliff for renters to fall off of when the moratorium expires and back rent is owed. This action delays but does not prevent evictions. Congress and the White House must get back to work on negotiations to enact a COVID-19 relief bill with at least **\$100 billion in emergency rental assistance**.

Together with a national eviction moratorium, this assistance would keep renters stably housed and small landlords able to pay their bills and maintain their properties during the pandemic."

Please join us in calling on Congress to take action now to enact a COVID-19 relief bill with the emergency rental assistance needed to truly prevent millions of people from losing their homes.

How You Can Help

Our providers need your help! This [site](#) includes ways you can join Connecticut's homeless response.

Webinars & Additional Guidance

With information about COVID rapidly evolving, keeping up-to-date is more important than ever. Stay up-to-date by visiting CCEH's COVID Guidance Page, located at cceh.org/covid19

Upcoming Webinars

[Components of an Effective Outreach System \(Session 2\)](#)

Wednesday, September 30, 2020
11:00am-12:00pm

[Motivational Interviewing Workshop](#)

Thursday, October 29th & Friday, October 30th, 2020
9:00 am-12:00 pm

Previously Recorded Webinars

- [Components of an Effective Outreach System](#)
- [How Vulnerable is the Homeless Population to COVID-19? Results from a National Study](#)
- [Addressing Racialized Trauma and Actively Engaging in Anti-Racism](#)
- [Having a Harm Reduction Approach During a Pandemic \(Session 2\)](#)
- [Having a Harm Reduction Approach During a Pandemic \(Session 1\)](#)
- [Update on the Status of Evictions in CT During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
- [Working with Landlords to Rapidly House Successfully: Recruiting, Engaging and Retaining](#)

Please [click here](#) to access our entire webinar catalog.

CCEH in the News

[Hungry and Homeless In Hartford](#)
NBC Connecticut - September 2020



Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness | 257 Lawrence Street, Hartford, CT 06106

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