

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: CPT Bill Cochran – Topeka Police Department

Subject: House Concurrent Resolution No. 5032

Date: March 12, 2012

Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) began in Memphis, Tennessee in 1988 as a result of a law enforcement encounter with a person who was in a mental health crisis. The situation escalated to the point in which the officers eventually took lethal action and shot and killed the individual. The question became, not did the law enforcement officers do anything wrong, but rather could things have been handled better and the answer was yes.

Through the efforts of law enforcement and the mental health community CIT was born. CIT program is a unique alliance between police and the community for the common goals of safety, understanding and service to the mentally ill and their families. The program was developed to provide a more effective, compassionate and safer approach to interacting with people who suffer a mental illness or developmental disability crisis. Through special training, the program provides officers with a more intelligent approach to mental health crisis events in our community.

The CIT model encourages communities, families, law enforcement officers and mental health professionals to act as a compass for persons with mental illness. An increase in illegal narcotic and alcohol abuse and the “deinstitutionalization” of mentally ill citizens can lead to an increase in homelessness and potential violence, and a consequent increase in involvement by law enforcement.

Traditional police methods, misinformation, and a lack of sensitivity have caused fear and frustration for the mentally ill and their families. As a proactive program, CIT works to prevent tragic situations and find “win-win” solutions for all persons concerned.

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), Valeo Behavioral Health Care and the Topeka Police Department agree that an immediate response is preferable in a crisis. By offering an immediate, humane and calm approach, CIT officers reduce the likelihood of physical confrontations and enhance better care for our citizens with mental health issues.

Since its inception, citizens and the criminal justice system of Shawnee County and Topeka and other communities across Kansas have experienced significant benefits of the program, including:

- a decrease in arrests and use of force
- the ability to identify mentally ill persons and provide them with appropriate care

- a decrease in patient violence and use of restraints in the ER
- better trained and educated officers in verbal de-escalation techniques
- a decline in officer injuries during crisis events
- an increase in officer recognition and appreciation by the community
- fewer victimless crime arrests
- a decrease in liability for health care issues in the jail cost savings