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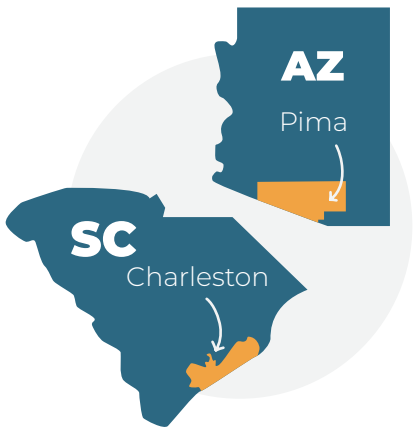
Reconsidering Police as Frontline Educators

POLICE AS FRONTLINE EDUCATORS

When police are in the field, they receive calls for service to many scenarios and must make complex decisions about how to handle these situations, including **how best to resolve** behavioral health and crisis calls. Traditionally, many of these types of calls end in arrest and booking the individual into jail, where they receive few treatment services. Instead, police led-deflection offers an alternative to arrest— **a deflection to a local crisis center** or treatment provider. However, when police must choose between a traditional arrest and deflection, **they must take into consider several factors.**

WEIGHING FACTORS TO DEFLECT IN CHARLESTON COUNTY, SC

In JSP’s study of police-led deflection in two sites, **Pima County Arizona and Charleston County South Carolina**, officers described in detail many factors they consider before offering a deflection.



Some officers describe **first considering the underlying incident or situation** that brought the person to the attention of police, and if the underlying offense makes the person statutorily ineligible for deflection.

In Charleston County, SC, police officers stated the **victims’ wishes in any given situation is the most important factor** they consider when deciding between offering a deflection or making an arrest – even when they recognize an arrest will not help the person.

Other officers describe the **cooperation** of the individual during the encounter informs their decision.

Officers across **both** sites described that they considered if a victim, including a business, is involved in the situation.



Officer Nielson explained...

“Really the issue comes down [to] if there’s a victim or not. One of the more common things that comes up is fighting and beating someone up. Does that person want to prosecute? And, if they do, then we’re most likely going to transport them to jail. If the victim doesn’t want to prosecute it basically comes down [to] if we can even make an arrest or if arresting the person is even appropriate because their behavior is about being in a mental health crisis.”



Officer Nielson’s comments suggests **victims can have a strong influence over an officer’s decision to either deflect or arrest.** Deferring to victims during behavioral health calls can invite victims’ own perceptions of justice and implicit biases into a situation that requires **specialized or clinical decision-making training.**

04. Police as Frontline Educators

There are certain individuals who experience the **criminal legal-system revolving door** more than others. In Charleston County, **Black men diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum disorder and other psychotic disorders** were more likely to **receive an arrest following a deflection** to the local crisis center. The data in the study cannot explain if victims were involved in the decision making of these arrests. However, **stereotypes** of Black people – Black men specifically – have rendered their behavior as **pathological, deviant, or criminal**. These perceptions of Black men, exacerbated by the symptoms of their diagnoses, further **compound** the ways Black men are seen in the field by **victims and officers, and ultimately the potential resources they are offered**.

RECONSIDERING POLICE AS EDUCATORS TO ADVANCE DEFLECTION

When officers defer to **victim's wishes** it invites potential **bias** and influence an officer to arrest. This can temper agency goals to reduce jail populations. This is not to suggest that officers shouldn't consider victims, but it does point out the **tension** police are experiencing when trying to do what is best for the individual while also **honoring the victim's wishes**.

A way police can **change this dynamic** is to consider each behavioral health call with a victim as an opportunity to **educate the victim about a behavioral health approach** to policing.

These conversations could include:

1. Discuss mental health symptomatology and its connection to the behavior the victim experienced.
2. The immediate benefits of a crisis center or a treatment provider as a better alternative to jail for the individual.
3. The long-term benefits the exposure to a crisis center or treatment could provide to the individual and the greater community.

As new frontline educators, police can legitimize the behavioral health approach to public safety by helping victims understand the benefits to treatment for people instead of arresting them.



Discuss mental health **symptomatology** and its connection to the behavior the victim experienced



The **immediate benefits** of a crisis center or a treatment **provider as a better alternative to jail** for the individual



The **long-term benefits** the exposure to a crisis center or treatment could provide

LEARN MORE

about the impacts of police-led deflection strategies on jail reduction efforts

WE BLOGGED ABOUT IT



This document was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.