



PREVENTING VIOLENCE
AND DEVELOPING
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH ALIVE!
3300 Elm Street
Oakland, CA 94609
Tel: (510) 594-2588
Fax: (510) 594-0667
mail@youthalive.org
www.youthalive.org

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Bill Dodd
Chair, Senate Committee on Governmental Organization
California State Capitol, Room 4032
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2054 (Kamlager) Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (C.R.I.S.E.S.) Act –SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Gonzalez:

On behalf of Youth ALIVE!, I am writing in strong support of AB 2054 (Kamlager), which will establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (C.R.I.S.E.S.) Act pilot grant program, to fundamentally improve emergency responses for vulnerable populations in California, by strengthening, expanding and promoting community-based responses to emergency situations.

Youth ALIVE! is a nationally recognized community-based organization known for initiating an alliance to treat violence as a public health crisis and developing young leaders in the process. Tasked as Oakland’s anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention, and healing, Youth ALIVE! has maintained a successful track record of implementing evidence-based violence intervention and prevention services. Our decades of experience addressing community violence informs our support of AB 2054.

In many counties across the state, community organizations are successfully responding to emergency situations involving people experiencing a public health crisis, people who are unhoused, people experiencing a mental health crisis, people exposed to intimate partner or community violence, people experiencing substance abuse, and people involved in natural or climate disasters. Despite their positive impact and the cost savings that community-oriented responses to emergencies present, California has done little to support and scale these efforts. Instead, law enforcement officers continue to respond to emergencies that would be better addressed by community organizations with trained peer support experts, mental health providers, or crisis counselors.

Unfortunately, the presence of armed officers can quickly escalate and exacerbate a crisis. In many instances, involvement by law enforcement officers increases the threat of feeling unsafe, risk of arrest or deportation, harm to the individual experiencing the crisis, and unnecessary costs including the time spent by the responding officers. In worst case scenarios, officers use force in response to a person in crisis, resulting in unnecessary and unjust deaths and serious bodily injury to those who simply needed the care and support of trained professionals.

The proposed pilot seeks to fill the void currently existing in emergency response services for vulnerable populations so that young people of color, people with disabilities, people who are gender nonconforming, people who are likely to face disproportionate police contact, people who are formerly incarcerated, people with immigration status issues and

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YOUTH ALIVE!
3300 Elm Street
Oakland, Ca 94609
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people who are unhoused or homeless can safely access quality emergency services that are culturally appropriate and from trained professionals with relationships and a track record of service in their communities. These vulnerable populations face significant barriers to engaging with law enforcement and other first responder personnel because of deep rooted fears and stigma generated by their status. In these circumstances, the presence of trained professionals from community-oriented organizations with a track-record of service can prove more beneficial than engagement from law enforcement officers.

During this current COVID-19 public health crisis, community-based organizations (CBOs) have stepped up to ensure vulnerable people are safe and healthy and meeting their emerging needs. CBOs across the state are delivering food, hand-washing stations, life-saving information, and support for survivors who are sheltering-in-place in unsafe homes. Investing in the ability of CBOs to respond to local crises will improve the health and safety of our whole community. As we are seeing with COVID-19, CBOs are best positioned to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, and when they are resourced to do this critical work---we all benefit!

While there are a wide variety of innovative community organizations engaged in successfully meeting the needs of vulnerable populations in emergency situations, California does not have a policy, a set of protocols, or dedicated funding to support and strengthen community organizations' involvement. AB 2054 will fix this by supporting culturally informed and appropriate responses to immediate emergency situations, as well as in the follow-up to those emergencies by ensuring the involvement of community organizations with a deeper knowledge and understanding of the issues, people, and set of relationships surrounding the emergency, enabling them to provide more effective and cost-efficient services.

For these reasons, Youth ALIVE! supports AB 2054 and respectfully requests your "Aye" vote. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Marks".

Anne Marks
Executive Director