



Allentown

435 Hamilton Street
Allentown, Pa. 18101

Minutes - Final

City Council

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

5:30 PM

Council Chambers

Special Meeting

Roll Call

Present: 5 - Candida Affa, Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks, Ed Zucal, and Ce-Ce Gerlach

Excused: 1 - Santo Napoli

Absent: 1 - Natalie Santos

Council President Hendricks

This evening is a Special Council meeting to review the initiative that has been introduced and must be acted on in the form submitted by City Council by June 19th. I would like to thank everyone for working with our office to set up this evening's agenda. They have 45 minutes of prepared testimony. At 6:15 PM, the Public Works Committee meeting will start and that is followed by a City Council meeting at 6:30 PM. We will reconvene the Special Council Meeting on June 15th at 6:30 PM to further review and act on the initiative. At that time, we will take additional testimony and then public comment, prior to Council vote. Let us proceed with the first speaker on the agenda.

1. WELCOME: Imogen Wirth, Lehigh County resident, canvasser for Petition for Bill 47

2. INTRODUCTION: Susan Jordhamo, member of Petitioners' Committee for Bill 47, Allentown resident

3. REVIEW OF 3 YEARS OF COMMUNITY & CITY ACTION LEADING TO THIS PETITION: Imogen Wirth

4. REVIEW OF ORDINANCE & RATIONALE: Imogen Wirth

5. EXPERT TESTIMONY: Chad Bruckner, retired Lansdale Police Department Detective, cadet instructor at Montgomery County Municipal Police Academy, former Army Infantry sergeant, certified Mental Health Peer Advocate, Lehigh County resident.

6. EXPERT TESTIMONY: Alex Domingos, Senior Organizer, American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania's Campaign for Smart Justice

7. **EXPERT TESTIMONY: Linda Mancenelli, retired nurse, Allentown resident**
8. **EXPERT TESTIMONY: Dr. Jenna Jebitsch, clinical psychologist, Allentown resident**
9. **EXPERT TESTIMONY: Ruby Cruz, Allentown resident, former corrections officer and former professional mental health advocate**
10. **TESTIMONY: April Riddick, lifelong Allentown resident, community advocate**
11. **TESTIMONY: Silvia Evangelista, Allentown resident, canvasser for Petition for Bill 47**
12. **TESTIMONY: Matthew Ming Lo, lifelong Allentown resident, data science and finance technology professional, canvasser for Petition for Bill 47**
13. **TESTIMONY: Johnathan Favini, canvasser for Petition for Bill 47, Lehigh Valley resident**
14. **TESTIMONY: Jon Irons, Lehigh County resident, former caseworker in Allentown School District, data manager for Communities in Schools of Eastern Pennsylvania located in Allentown, canvasser for Petition for Bill 47**
15. **CLOSING: Imogen Wirth**

[15-5854](#)

Bill 47

An ordinance introduced as an initiative pursuant to the Home Rule Charter of the City of Allentown approving the creation of a public health pilot program providing alternative first response to calls for service involving mental and behavioral health, substance use, welfare checks, and "quality of life" complaints such as family and neighbor disputes, issues related to unhoused persons, and calls about suspicious persons; authorizing the expenditure of four million, eighty two thousand dollars (\$4,082,000.00) and calling for a Request for Proposals to be issued.

Attachments: [Bill 47 Public Health Pilot Program](#)
[Bill Public Health Pilot Program](#)
[Citizens' Rights and Participation \(3\)](#)
[Sufficient Signatures for Petition](#)

Ms. Imogen Wirth stated good evening and thank you for inviting the Petitioner's Committee. She stated that Susan Jordhamo is here tonight and is a member of the Petitioner's Committee and will open the meeting on why she supports Bill 47 and she will resume with the history and ordinance itself.

Ms. Susan Jordhamo stated why supports MCRT. She has lived in Allentown for seven years and currently retired, but worked as a public secondary school teacher and worked with people that have mental and behavior health challenges. She lived in Philadelphia for 15 years in the Black and Brown neighborhoods. She believes in a law-and-order response to many situations is completely appropriate. She imagines the training is focused on order. She talked about therapeutic staff support and dealing with people with mental health issues in a positive way. She stated that having a Mobile Community Response Team makes so much sense to her. She stated wouldn't it be better to have people trained to deal with troubled people than to only have police personnel with their uniforms, handcuffs, and tasers. Northampton County has a Crisis Intervention Unit and a Crisis Walk - in Center in the Human Services building and Lancaster County has a MCRT program.

Ms. Imgen Wirth stated that she will talk about the three years of Community Action. She talked about the tool of the Ballot Referendum. Per the City Charter, if Council does not approve Bill 47, it will go to Lehigh County for inclusion on the ballot in November posed to the voters. Based on a city public meeting agenda, City Council intends to debate two potential ballot referendum later this week to raise the salary of the Controller and their own salaries. There has been dismay from the city administration on the process. She stated that the initiative was not taken lightly. This was three years worth of community organizing and action and discussion with the community and government. She spoke of May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed at the hands of the Police in Minnesota during Covid created a national and global movement of people being concerned on mental health crisis on drug use and other issues and the way that law enforcement handles this. There were many demonstrations held in Allentown and Mayor Matt Tuerk rode his bike in many of them. Shortly thereafter, July 11, 2020, an Allentown Police department officer restrained a man in crisis. Using his kneeling on his neck. The same way that Goerge Floyd was murdered. It was covered nationally. There was article by Mark Pinsley and The Morning Call calling for alternative crisis response as a result a method to respond to this. The Allentown Police Reform Resolution 94 passed on August 12, 2020. A lot of that Bill was the Eight Can't Wait Police Reforms. In June 2021, stakeholders attended a meeting with the County Executive, former Police Chief, now Council President Daryl Hendricks, Pinebrook Family Services as well as other city and county leaders. In 2021 at a City Council meeting, CAHOOTS was able to present. Later that year in October, the Deputy Police Chief Sam Castello and Anne Larson from Olympia Police Department presented during a City Council meeting. Numerous community leaders met with Chief Roca about this with Julie Thomases and Hasshan Batts. The reason they went to the Ballot is because they were not happening fast

enough. In early 2023, the signature gathering phase there were representatives attending community meetings. Mayor Tuerk attended the 1st and 6th Ward meetings and he let her know that he opposed the Ordinance. Sergeant Leonard presents it at Franklin Park Community Conversation and spoke of the number one crime in Allentown is theft of motor vehicles and 911 calls have been consistently been going up and talked about resources. In reviewing the mental health calls that the Allentown Police Department responded to in 2022, Sergeant Leonard said that there were 3,000 calls to 911 that the Police deemed as mental health calls, only 352 referred to Pinebrook and over 100 Allentown Police Department Officers have completed a 40 hour training for the Crisis Intervention Team. She spoke to Jordan Westerman who designed the City of Bethlehem's Co-Response Program and received \$1 million in Department of Justice funds to be able to get that Program started in a smaller city. The Ordinance itself was authored by The Wren Collective - A Social Justice Law Firm and former Public Defender. She read the first paragraph of the Ordinance. Representative Schlossberg's Bill that just passed is going to have \$100 million towards Mental Health in Pennsylvania and organization that fund and provide grants to these types of Programs. There are 85 Programs like this. She explained what is MCRT (Mobile Community Responder Team) which will be a 24/7 program. She stated that data will be collected with quarterly data reports. She read Retired Detective Chad Bruckner's statement (Lansdale Police Department and a Certified Mental Health Peer Advocate) on cities across the nation and Police Departments are facing a significant challenge in maintaining adequate staffing levels and the call center inundated with low level calls that do not necessary require an armed Police Officer's response and explained the LEAP Program.

Mr. Alex Domingos, Advocacy and Policy Strategist - ACLU of Pennsylvania, speaking on behalf of the members, donors, and supporters. He stated that he resides in Allentown. They are proud to support this important Ballot Initiative and uplift the will of Allentown residents and increasing public safety via a Crisis Response Pilot Program. He discussed diverse jurisdictions across the country have implemented Crisis Response similar to the one being proposed here in addition to the CAHOOTS Program. Cities have seen successes with this model. According to a Right to Know Request filed by the ACLU nearly 100,000 911 calls were made from Allentown last year. The six most frequent call was Check on Welfare, the 19th most frequent was Psych emergency. Even diverting a fraction of these calls to trained mental health professionals could reduce police use of force, violence against people with disabilities, and de-escalate situations and prevent unnecessary arrest and involvement in a criminal legal system. He emphasized that this measure has no effect on Police Budgets, Programming, Staffing, or

Initiatives. This program is simply adding another tool to Allentown's Public Safety Toolkit to increase effectiveness and promote the health and safety of our community members. In places across the country they have seen measures like this work and enhance public safety and don't want to be left behind in doing what's best for the average everyday people that you all serve. He sincerely hopes for the support of Council.

Ms. Linda Mancenelli, Allentown resident, stated that she has lived here since 1975. She is a Registered Nurse and attended Sacred Heart Hospital School of Nursing. The reason she brought up that she is an RN is because she is a mandated reporter. If she feels that there is abuse or the possibility of abuse happening to a child, it is her responsibility to tell someone. She lives on S. 10th Street in Allentown and had occasion to hear certain arguments from families. One incident she heard a woman talking about the fact she was choked, and she heard her say, you are not going to choke my little girl. As soon as she heard this, she called 911. The woman left the house before the police arrived and pulled up in her car. The other incident was with the same family and she felt the need to call 911. She did not know if the adult involved had mental health issues. This is why she feels that this type of initiative is very much needed in Allentown. Dealing with families, you might have one person that has mental health issues. Because if they do, they may or may not be receiving treatment. If there are children involved, they are certainly being put at risk. Her two daughters are involved in the mental health arena. Her oldest daughter is Dr. Jenna Jebitsch is a Psychologist. However, she was not able to be here, but supports this as well. Her youngest daughter is a Mental Health Peer Counselor that does home visits and also supports this.

Mr. Ronald Bryan Johnson stated that she is speaking on behalf of Sylvia Evangelista who was not able to make it because she was not able to get out of work. She is a hardworking mother of three and help them collect signatures in the bilingual regions of Allentown. She is a notable and honorable civic leader in the Latino community in Allentown. He made Ms. Evangelista's comment in Spanish. She stated that they need to invest in mental health resources and social work. When there are nonviolent situations arises where there are a homeless person involved or someone suffering from a mental health crisis, the city of Allentown should have a Response Team with Social Workers and Mental Health Professionals because these are professional who are best equipped to address these issues do to their extensive training. A Social Worker studies years in order to adequately be prepared to solve those problems in our community which is facing. The professionals with the relevant preparation and training should be the candidates the city of Allentown uses to resolve these problems.

Mr. Matthew Ming Lo, born and raised in Allentown, stated that he works in IT at a bank. He referred to Denver's Pilot Program for their Community Response Team called the STAR Program (Support Team Assisted Response) for six months in 2020. It occurred in eight of the 36 precincts with a 14 percent reduction in overall crimes. He went over the findings with 34 reductions in STAR related offenses. The leading cause of death in young people between the ages of 18 and 45 in this country is fentanyl overdoses. The second leading cause of death is suicide. The despair could be more adequately addressed by Crisis Response Teams. He talked about cost savings. Allentown has some of the highest property taxes in Lehigh County. He stated that 20 percent of the 911 calls could be addressed by this team. In the city of Denver, this did not lead to defunding the Police.

Ms. Imogen Wirth stated that some of the members that were not able to speak today, will be able to join them on Thursday for the second meeting. She knows there will be a public comment period.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that there will be a comment period.

Ms. Imogen Wirth stated that they look forward to that and to continue the conversation with all of them and the public. She hopes that Council was able to learn more of how these programs have been enacted in other places, why Allentown really needs this and why this group of Allentown voters and residents came together to use the democratic ballot referendum as a tool to bring this Ordinance to Council today and potentially on the ballot in November.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks thanked Ms. Wirth and stated that this meeting will be continued for those who has concerns about it on Thursday, on June 15, 2023 at 6:30 PM in the evening.

ADJOURNED: 6:14 PM