

Cleveland submits new police crisis intervention policy

January 20 2017, by Mark Gillispie

City police officers with specialized training will be able to refer anyone having a mental health or substance abuse crisis to a hospital or treatment facility rather than arrest them for minor crimes, according to federal court documents filed late Thursday.

The crisis intervention policy was formulated as part of a court-ordered agreement to reform Cleveland's police department and was submitted to U.S. District Court Judge Solomon Oliver Jr.

Oliver is overseeing the 2015 agreement between Cleveland and the U.S. Department of Justice, which concluded that officers had shown a pattern and practice of using excessive force on people, including the mentally ill.

The new policy aims to improve the safety of officers and those in crisis and to reduce the need for involvement with the criminal justice system, the court filing said.

The city has been working with the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County, court officials and [mental health](#) and addiction specialists to create the new policy required by the agreement, called a consent decree.

William Denihan, head of the ADAMHS Board, said the new policy is going to make "a huge difference" in how police treat the mentally ill.

"And that's because of the total collaboration that police have demonstrated through this process," Denihan said.

Officers in the 1,500 member department are expected to receive additional training this year about how to deal with people in crisis. Some officers will undergo 40 hours of training to be certified as specialists, allowing them to use discretion in deciding whether someone in crisis should get treatment instead of being arrested.

The policy calls for people suspected of committing felonies or crimes like domestic violence but in some type of crisis to be transported to a secure mental health facility before being arrested.

About 3,000 police departments in the U.S. have similar policies, the court filing said.

The policy calls on officers to be patient and to try calming people with de-escalation techniques while using a minimum amount of force. The policy forbids officers from placing handcuffed people on their abdomens to avoid the possibility of positional asphyxiation.

Two Cleveland police officers are subjects of a criminal investigation being conducted by the Ohio attorney general's office in the November 2014 death of 37-year-old Tanisha Anderson. Her family called police for help after Anderson, who had a history of mental illness, became disoriented and went outside on a cold day wearing just a nightgown.

A lawsuit filed by family members said Anderson lost consciousness after officers slammed her to the ground. The Cuyahoga County Medical examiner said Anderson couldn't breathe after being placed on her abdomen.

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