



Office of the City Manager

ACTION CALENDAR

April 26, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Submitted by: Peter Radu, Assistant to the City Manager

Subject: Companion Report: Development of Crisis Stabilization Program in Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

There has been interest expressed by the Homeless Commission and Mental Health Commission in establishing Crisis Stabilization Units (CSU) within the geographical boundaries of Berkeley.

Given the significant changes coming to the crisis system in Berkeley, the opportunities to increase the use of the Amber House CSU (which persistently has vacant beds) by Berkeley residents, the significant costs in funding and siting a CSU in Berkeley, the complexities of Medi-Cal billing for a CSU funded by Berkeley, staff do not recommend creating a CSU in Berkeley at this time.

Instead, Berkeley could partner with the Alameda County Behavioral HealthCare (ACBH) Plan and Bay Area Community Services (BACS) on increasing the use of Amber House by Berkeley residents and, over the coming 12-18 months, assess the need for additional options for treatment of individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Data from the coming Peer Respite and Specialized Care Unit (SCU) could support informing a plan for building out that crisis system in Berkeley. It is conceivable that better coordination of referrals to Amber House and a non-licensed crisis support program such as the Peer Respite could meet the need in Berkeley at a significantly reduced cost and with far less difficulty than funding and siting a CSU in Berkeley.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

A CSU located in Berkeley would be expensive to both build and operate. As the City of Berkeley is a contract provider for the Alameda County Behavioral HealthCare (ACBH) Plan, and as such cannot subcontract Medi-Cal billing, a CSU in Berkeley would either need to forgo billing Medi-Cal (a very significant revenue stream for funding a CSU), or Berkeley would need to develop a contract with ACBH to transfer funding for a CSU in Berkeley, and ACBH would need to contract for and oversee the construction and operation of a CSU.

If ACBH were to contract for and oversee the construction and operation of a CSU, these elements would need to follow the procurement processes in place for ACBH.

Importantly, ACBH leadership has indicated to City staff that they do not currently see the need for a CSU in Berkeley, and would not be inclined to provide any funding for such an effort.

### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Crisis Stabilization Units are short-term (less than 24 hours) residential treatment programs that provide immediate care to individuals experiencing an acute mental health or co-occurring mental health and substance use concern. CSUs typically provide service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and offer an alternative to hospital emergency rooms or jail for individuals who are facing an urgent behavioral health concern that cannot be adequately addressed in a community setting. CSU services programs are part of many California counties array of crisis services.

Amber House, which is located in Uptown Oakland and operated by Bay Area Community Services (BACS), also contains a 14-bed Crisis Residential Treatment Program (CRT) for individuals in crisis who would benefit from a longer period of support and stabilization and do not meet the criteria for hospitalization. Established in the Fall of 2019, Amber House serves individuals who have Alameda County Medi-Cal or no insurance.

In FY22, Amber House has maintained a daily census (number of individuals utilizing the CSU) of roughly 1.5 clients a day – with a capacity to serve 12 individuals at a time. This underutilization data aligns with the information presented by BACS staff at the Mental Health Commission meeting on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, where BACS reported that Amber House CSU has never had to turn away a person due to capacity issues, and usage is generally well under capacity.

Individuals in a mental health crisis that do not meet the criteria for transport to a receiving facility for a 5150 evaluation can be voluntarily transported or referred to Amber House. Amber House reports that clients have been referred by the following categories: Self (28%), Treatment Teams, including Full Service Partnerships (32%), Outpatient Mental Health Clinics (4%), Police Drop Off (2%), Hospital ER (8%), Substance Use Programs (2%), Mobile Crisis Providers (11%), Friends or family (7%), and other sources (6%).

### BACKGROUND

On November 15, 2021, the Homeless Commission passed a motion as follows:

That City Council refer to the City Manager to develop a crisis stabilization program based on the Bend, Oregon crisis stabilization model tailored to Berkeley, consistent and that this report be incorporated into the Homeless Commission's recommendation.

**Vote:** Ayes: Marasovic, Gomez, Kealoha-Blake.

**Noes:** None. **Abstain:** Andrew. **Absent:** Behm-Steinberg.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Following the implementation of a crisis stabilization program, some persons in mental health crisis could be diverted away from transport to further away institutions. There are no other known environmental or climate impacts from this project.

## RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Per report by Alameda County, Amber House is currently underutilized, and consistently has open beds for individuals who would benefit from and are interested in a CSU. Close to the South Berkeley border, use of this facility should be maximized prior to determining if there is need for additional CSU capacity for Berkeley residents. This could be done through:

- Collaborating with ACBH and BACS around a publicity campaign for utilization of Amber House by Berkeley providers, residents, and the Berkeley Police Department (BPD). This could include development of marketing materials and trainings.
- Structured training for BPD around utilization of Amber House, and collaboration with ACBH and BACS on developing clear procedures and protocols for BPD referral and drop-off of individuals for Amber House.
- Increase the ability of the Mental Health Division Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) to help individuals they interact with utilize Amber House. Currently, the MCT can provide bus tickets or taxi vouchers to individuals who want to access Amber House. Successful MCT referrals to Amber House could be increased by:
  - Developing a partnership between MCT/CAT and Amber House, including regular meetings on referrals.
  - Tracking MCT successful referrals to Amber House.
  - Increasing options for MCT referral to Amber House to include ride-sharing options like Lyft or Uber.
  - Evaluating directing the MCT to transport voluntary clients to Amber House. The MCT currently respond to individuals having a behavioral health crisis in a co-responder model with BPD, but does not transport individuals who do not meet criteria for a 5150 to alternate destinations. This change would include developing clear procedures for transport and assessing current vehicles for safety for transport, and tracking the use of Amber House by individuals referred or transported by MCT. This would likely trigger the need to meet and confer with local 1021 due to a change in working conditions for staff of the MCT. This change would likely be expensive due to need for alternate vehicles for MCT and slow, so pros and cons of this option should be examined.

Berkeley could also work with Amber House and ACBH to determine the utilization of beds at Amber House for Berkeley residents, and to identify any issues that Berkeley residents might be experiencing at discharge due to the location of Amber House.

Berkeley is currently in the process of adding two additional elements to the system of care for individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. When operational, these additional resources may further decrease the need for a new CSU in Berkeley. These are:

- Peer respite at the Berkeley Drop-In Center (BDC). This program will create capacity for BDC to provide peer respite services to individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis.
- A Specialized Care Unit (SCU). The SCU is envisioned to provide 24/7, 365 days a year mobile crisis services and support to Berkeley residents, and will have the capacity to transport individuals in crisis to a variety of locations. The SCU is intended to divert individuals having a behavioral health crisis from a law enforcement response, instead having the first point of contact be behavioral health providers. The addition of the SCU to existing crisis response options (MCT, BPD) should give a lot more data on the interest and need for a CSU.

Staff believe that the City should explore the development of a Berkeley-specific CSU and/or other opportunities to serve this vulnerable population only after this current array of resources are exhausted,. Establishing a CSU site in Berkeley would be premature at this time, given the underutilized resources and the County's current lack of interest in engaging.

#### ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Council could site and fund a CSU within the geographical boundaries of Berkeley. In evaluating this option, it is crucial to clearly define the need and the financial viability of funding and siting a CSU in Berkeley.

#### CONTACT PERSON

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