

Dear East Bay Express editors,

We agree with the perspective you shared from Michael Haddad, the defense attorney featured in "[Mental Health 911](#)" article published 4/6/2016. We're members and allies of [a healthworkers cohort which aims to decouple healthcare from policing](#), because we see the antagonistic role that police play in relation to health and community wellbeing.

Cops are not medics, and more training cannot undo the fundamental role of law enforcement: to stop, arrest, and send people to jail. The imprisonment and disproportionate impacts of policing on people of color, poor people, and people with specific mental health needs/disabilities (which your article mentions), illustrate that these communities are exactly the people who cops are trained to see as "problems," and to interrogate and detain.

If we can imagine wasting resources to train police, why aren't we imagining using these resources instead to invest in people who are actually best suited to be mental health responders — mental health specialists and medics? Putting a first aid kit on a cop is ridiculous; s/he is still carrying a gun, and at the end of the day (heck, even at the beginning), this is what s/he is trained to reach for. What we need is less policing, not more. What we need is a re-prioritization of resources, so that we have competent, non-coercive, and confident mental health specialists available thru 911 as first responders — not cops. What we need are adequate health resources that are not connected to policing or imprisonment available in our communities, and a decent popular knowledge of the mental health spectrum; we don't have to be afraid of people with mental health needs.

The first step is to refuse wasteful proposals that again legitimize police as the appropriate first responders. When imagining how to support and address the needs of our most vulnerable communities, we need to be thinking about how to provide them with buffers from policing and imprisonment, rather than bringing them closer together.

Signed,

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\*Views expressed reflect those of the individuals at Berkeley Free Clinic and not necessarily those of the organization.