



DANE COUNTY

Joe Parisi
County Executive

August 28, 2023

Kirsten Johnson, Secretary Designee
Department of Health Services

Dear Secretary-Designee Johnson:

I write to update you on a project Dane County has been working on as well as to make a request of your department related to our project. I speak of our efforts to build a Crisis Triage Center in Dane County.

Our goal to build a Crisis Triage Center (CTC) is to provide a welcoming non-hospital environment that provides short-term (no more than 23 hours) observation, assessment, treatment, and planning for individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The CTC would operate 24/7 and demonstrate a “no wrong door” philosophy, serving all those who present or are referred, including, but not limited to, individuals experiencing acute psychiatric symptoms, those under the influence of substances, and subjects of emergency detention. Ideally, the CTC would place emphasis on facilitating efficient referrals from first responders and facilitating rapid transfer of custody of those emergently detained by law enforcement. The proposed CTC is based on a model that successfully operates in this way in several other states and is a key part of the Crisis Now framework promoted by SAMHSA.

The ability of a CTC to provide home-like, trauma-informed, local care to subjects of emergency detention is one of the primary motivators behind our efforts. Currently, most of the individuals who require involuntary psychiatric care leave Dane County and are transported by law enforcement, typically handcuffed and in the back seat of a police car, to Winnebago Mental Health Institute. This transport usually takes place after a visit to one of our local emergency rooms for testing that will medically clear that person for admission to Winnebago. In many circumstances, the CTC could serve as a better treatment alternative for subjects of an emergency detention.

The ability of a CTC in Dane County to admit a person involuntarily has been the subject of many discussions between Dane County and the Department of Health Services. In the opinion of our Corporation Counsel, if we were to operate a CTC as described above, the facility would be operating as a “treatment facility” for emergency detention under Wis. Stat. §51.15(2)(d). However, in conversations Dane County staff have had with DHS staff, we have understood the department’s position to be that a CTC would not meet the criteria of any current licensing category and therefore cannot be permitted to operate by DHS.

Recently the Dane County Department of Human Services issued a Request for Proposals for an operator of the CTC. The Request for Proposals (RFP) contemplated a phased implementation approach to operating the center. Implementation would begin with voluntary admissions only.

The next phase, which was not defined by any time period, would serve all individuals including those who are the subject of an emergency detention. We began with a phase centered on voluntary admissions knowing that DHS recently awarded grants for what are called Crisis Stabilization Facilities, which are similar in scope to a voluntary-only CTC.

Unfortunately, we received no bids in response to our RFP. We solicited information from potential applicants. Part of the feedback we received from those who reviewed the RFP centered on this issue of accepting involuntary admissions. We heard that the regulatory environment that does not allow for involuntary admissions at the CTC contradicts a “no wrong door” philosophy that is at the heart of this model. Uncertainty over when this issue would be resolved contributed to the lack of interested operators.

Dane County remains committed to this model and level of care for people in need. I am requesting your help as we look to make this a reality. I would like to start by asking a few questions:

- Does DHS agree that a Crisis Triage Center, as Dane County has conceived of it, can be considered a treatment facility for emergency detentions under Wis. Stat. §51.15(2)(d)?
- Is there an existing regulation, including DHS 34, under which Dane County could license and operate a CTC?
- If legislation is necessary to license a CTC, is DHS willing to propose and support such legislation?

There is a mental health crisis in this state, including Dane County. Transporting subjects who are emergently detained to Winnebago Mental Health Institute is not in the subjects’ best interest and creates a strain on local law enforcement. A CTC could provide the needed treatment to many subjects, divert a large number of Dane County admissions to Winnebago Mental Health Institute, and keep people in the community. I urge you to consider taking whatever action possible to assist Dane County in facilitating this much needed community treatment option.

Sincerely,



Joe Parisi
Dane County Executive