

Justice Department Finds State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City Police Department Discriminate Against People with Behavioral Health Disabilities

 [justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-finds-state-oklahoma-oklahoma-city-and-oklahoma-city-police-department](https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-finds-state-oklahoma-oklahoma-city-and-oklahoma-city-police-department)

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Note: [View Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke's remarks here.](#) 

The Justice Department announced today that it has reasonable cause to believe that the State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City Police Department (OKCPD) discriminate against people with behavioral health disabilities. Specifically, the department [finds](#) that:

- Oklahoma unnecessarily institutionalizes, or puts at serious risk of unnecessary institutionalization, adults with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area, in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);

- Oklahoma City and OKCPD engage in a pattern or practice of conduct that discriminates against people with behavioral health disabilities when providing emergency response services, in violation of Title II of the ADA and the pattern or practice provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994.

“People with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area are not receiving the support they need,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Instead of accessing treatment in the community, they are institutionalized repeatedly. Further, when they call 911 for a behavioral health emergency, they get a response by armed police, even when there is no public safety issue identified. As a result, urgent mental health needs often go unaddressed and crisis situations are needlessly escalated, sometimes leading to avoidable use of force. We recognize that the state and the city are taking preliminary steps to improve access for and treatment of people with behavioral health disabilities. The Justice Department is committed to working collaboratively with Oklahoma and Oklahoma City so that they implement the right services and supports their communities need and institute a lasting remedial plan.”

The department’s investigation of the State of Oklahoma found that thousands of people with behavioral health disabilities are admitted to psychiatric hospitals in the Oklahoma County area each year, and many have long or repeated stays. Many also have long-term stays in nursing or residential care facilities. Most would prefer to live in their communities, surrounded by friends and family, and to have the freedom to make their own choices about their lives. These individuals could live successfully in their communities if they received critical community-based services that are proven to help people with behavioral health disabilities avoid unnecessary admissions or unnecessarily lengthy stays in segregated institutional settings. But Oklahoma does not provide sufficient services to prevent unnecessary institutionalization. As a result, many people with behavioral health disabilities never receive treatment until they are in crisis, when they instead end up needlessly hospitalized or in contact with law enforcement. For many in the Oklahoma County area, OKCPD is the law enforcement agency they encounter.

The investigation also concluded that when a person calls 911 seeking assistance with a behavioral health issue, the city sends police as the sole responders in most cases. In many cases these calls for assistance could be more effectively resolved by a response by behavioral health professionals who can provide appropriate treatment, but the city rarely involves such professionals. Instead, armed OKCPD officers respond to situations involving behavioral health needs, often failing to help, escalating crises or even unnecessarily using force.

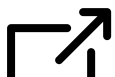
During the department’s investigation, both the state and city initiated improvements to their systems. The state continued to expand its crisis system and released an updated Olmstead plan, and the city announced plans to develop and provide a behavioral health response to 911 calls, and began to make improvements within OKCPD that will help address these violations.

The department will be conducting outreach to members of the Oklahoma community for input on remedies to address the department's findings. People may also submit recommendations by calling (888) 473-3460 or emailing MentalHealth.Oklahoma@usdoj.gov.

The department has opened 12 pattern and practice investigations into law enforcement agencies since 2021 pursuant to 34 U.S.C. 12601, and has been actively monitoring over a dozen agreements with law enforcement agencies that were secured prior to that period. Since 2021, the department has successfully concluded agreements and portions of consent decrees with the [Yonkers, New York, Police Department](#); the [Albuquerque, New Mexico, Police Department](#); the [Suffolk County, New York, Police Department](#); the [Portland, Oregon, Police Bureau](#); and the [Seattle Police Department](#). The department has issued findings reports concerning several agencies including: [Louisville, Kentucky, Metro Police Department](#); the [Minneapolis Police Department](#); the [Phoenix Police Department](#); the [Lexington, Mississippi, Police Department](#); the [Trenton, New Jersey, Police Department](#); the [Memphis, Tennessee, Police Department](#); the [Worcester, Massachusetts, Police Department](#); and the [Mt. Vernon, New York, Police Department](#). Investigations are ongoing regarding the [Louisiana State Police](#); the [New York City Police Department's Special Victims Division](#); and the [Rankin County, Mississippi, Sheriff's Department](#). The department also reached a court [enforceable agreement with Louisville](#) to resolve its findings.

Additional information about the Civil Rights Division is available at www.justice.gov/crt.

The Justice Department will hold a virtual community meeting on Jan. 7 at 6 p.m. CT. Members of the public are encouraged to attend to learn more about the findings. Please register to join the meeting at www.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_IzgZBC4IRJiw7tk3pfEXrw#/registration



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Topics

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