

US Justice Department finds violations in Oklahoma's treatment of mentally ill

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WASHINGTON, Jan 3 (Reuters) - The state of Oklahoma is violating federal law by unnecessarily committing people with mental illness and drug abuse disorders to psychiatric hospitals, the U.S. Justice Department concluded in a report released on Friday.

The report, from the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, also found that Oklahoma City, the state's largest city, defaults to sending police officers to deal with mental health crises even when there is no public safety threat.

Police sometimes "fail to help, escalate crises or even unnecessarily resort to force," according to the report.

"People with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area are not receiving the support they need," Kristen Clarke, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, said in a statement.

The report found that the state of Oklahoma and Oklahoma City violated a provision of the Americans with Disabilities Act and that police routinely discriminated against people with behavioral health disabilities.

The report marks the latest police oversight investigations completed by the Justice Department before the Trump administration takes charge on Jan. 20.

The department has now released findings in nine of the 12 police department probes that [began under Democratic President Joe Biden's administration](#). It has wrapped up five such investigations since President-elect Donald Trump won the Nov. 5 election. Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond, a Republican, said he supported reform of the mental health system, but criticized the publication of the report in the final weeks of the Biden administration.

"We will closely review the findings, but the DOJ report appears to be an attempt to bully Oklahoma into compliance with ever-changing and undefined targets," Drummond said in a statement.

Oklahoma City Police Chief Ron Bacy said the department is examining the Justice Department's findings, adding that police "will continue to work with our community partners to provide the best available resources to our residents."

The Justice Department in Trump's first term curtailed the use of "pattern-or-practice" investigations that assess any patterns of misconduct in state and local police departments.

Also on Friday, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division said it reached a court agreement with Georgia's Fulton County to enforce reforms to the county jail. The department in November found that the county, which includes the city of Atlanta, systematically violates the constitutional rights of the people it incarcerates.

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