
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



FOR INFORMATION CALL

October 28, 2020

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Proposed budget amendment seeks to create unarmed response unit within fire department

Alderman Chantia Lewis and Alderman Nikiya Dodd are sponsoring a budget amendment to be considered at tomorrow's meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee that would create an unarmed first responder pilot program within the Milwaukee Fire Department. In recent years, numerous cities have created new teams of paramedics, mental health professionals and peer support counselors to respond to emergency calls for people in psychiatric, behavioral or substance abuse crisis, in lieu of police. This amendment would bring Milwaukee one step closer to achieving a similar program.

"Throughout the summer we have heard calls for reform within the police department, and in particular to decrease the dependence on police response to non-violent situations," said Alderman Dodd. "During the fire department's budget hearing it was clear that there are already synergies that exist to help us meet this goal, and this amendment provides some support to test the theory."

Alderman Lewis, who sponsored recent legislation in support of an unarmed first responders program, sees this as a chance to enact meaningful reform. "We are in need of a different approach to responding to situations where individuals are clearly in desperate need of help that shouldn't involve law enforcement, and this amendment gets us moving toward that result," she said.

The amendment provides \$255,000 for three firefighter/paramedics in the department's Emergency Medical Services division (who would be assigned with a mental health crisis professional), and \$245,000 for program expenses. The cost would be offset by reducing police department salaries making the amendment budget neutral.

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Unarmed First Responders Amendment/ADD ONE

The unit created by this amendment would provide real-time wraparound services, collaborating for patient follow-up with the Community Paramedic program, Milwaukee Opioid Response Initiative, or other social service agencies as indicated by the specific needs of a patient from a given response.

Thursday's budget amendment meeting will be televised live on the City Channel (channel 25 on Spectrum Cable and channel 99 on AT&T U-Verse in the City of Milwaukee) and via streaming video on the city website at city.milwaukee.gov/Channel25. A subsequent meeting will be held on Friday, October 30th if needed.

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