

# **MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

**2021 has been a very unusual year. Most of the services that are provided to the homeless and those experiencing mental health crises have been limited or not available because of the COVID. This has also impacted the ability of the MHRAC to do those things that the Court Approved Settlement Agreement (CASA) has tasked us to do. The MHRAC however has pressed on and are certainly looking forward to a new year and hopefully with our new leadership and new members on the committee taking the MHRAC to the next level.**

**As was stated in the report from the Training/policy sub group, one of the success stories of this past year is the National Alliance on Mental Illness and their program that puts a face on those experiencing mental illness for first responders and law enforcement. The MHRAC, especially committee member Betty Whiton, was the main reason this program was established and now has become the national standard in law enforcement and first responders training. We continue our involvement in reviewing and making suggestions to the revision of policies and the establishment of new policy that impact those experiencing homelessness and those experiencing mental health crisis.**

**We also saw progress and a compromise as it relates to transportation of individuals who are deemed a threat to harm themselves or threatening suicide. The MHRAC, primarily our training/policy sub-committee was able to work out a rule change that allows these individuals to be transported to the emergency room by Emergency Medical Service/Albuquerque Fire and Rescue rather than handcuffed in the back of a patrol car. We have also been involved and seen some major improvement and progress on the clearing of homeless encampments.**

**We also have been involved with the city in the discussion and their purchase of the new Gateway Center that when operational will increase the number of homeless beds available. The discussion has been ongoing as to what the facility will look like and who and how it will serve not only the homeless, but the entire community. The city has made sure that the MHRAC has a seat at the table and is involved with the process going forward. We imagine that in the new year the focus on the fine points of this facility will be the main topic of conversation and we look forward to coming alongside those in leadership for this new facility and the discussion as we move closer to seeing it become a reality.**

**We also saw the creation of the new Albuquerque Community Safety Department assembled and starting to interact with the community. While our initial response to the ACS was positive and we saw this new department as the natural progression of moving law**

enforcement away from calls that could be handled by non-law enforcement, and also using trained mental health professionals when needed. However, we quickly realized that this new department didn't want the MHRAC involved on areas that the CASA directs the MHRAC to be involved in. While we repeatedly advised the ACS leadership what our role was, we were left out and only received updates from this group. Training was taking place and we were advised after the fact of what the curriculum looked like. While it appears as I write this report that there certainly was confusion and misinformation coming from the current administration to the ACS leadership, we believe that this confusion has now been cleared up as we heard from the City Attorney at the last status conference. This confusion was also put to rest by a statement from the Department of Justice concerning this issue. The MHRAC has again in recent meetings explained to ACS leadership what the role of MHRAC as outlined in the CASA and as it relates to the city's response to homelessness and that experiencing mental health crisis. We hope that in the coming year, the MHRAC will be able to come alongside ACS and the city and assist them in providing a better product to the community.

I have mentioned new leadership several times in the report and need to clarify that Rick Miera and myself are stepping down from our position as co-chairs and the committee has elected two new co-chairs, Rachel Biggs and Max Kaufman. Rick and I have enjoyed our time on the MHRAC and will miss being involved but we are excited where the new leadership and new membership on the committee will take this very important group.

Respectfully submitted:

Rick Miera,  
Co-Chair

Danny Whatley.  
Co-Chair