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RE: Barlow praises Albany co-responder program
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CONTACT: Edward M. Cook, edwardmcook@comcast.net, 617.778.4628

Registered Nurse Joyce Barlow praises Albany Police Chief's criminal justice reform program

Joyce Barlow, RN, of Albany spoke out to applaud the visionary "co-responder" pilot program that Police Chief Michael Persley has initiated as a partnership between the Albany Police Department and Aspire Behavioral Health.

"This is the kind of inspired criminal justice reform that assures our citizens that the police are here to serve and protect," said Barlow.

"Chief Persley should be applauded for his unique leadership, and I believe this program can serve as a model for the state of Georgia."

The co-responder partnership pairs clinicians from Aspire with police officers to respond to emergent health and substance abuse calls. The response could be a referral to a doctor at Phoebe or Aspire or a detox facility, to a marriage counselor or to police back-up, if needed. The APD officer will be on-site to keep the clinician safe during the evaluation.

Barlow's career as a nursing professional has provided her with extensive experience in helping people struggling with domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse issues that impact so many in Albany. She was recently honored as one in the first group of inductees into the Georgia Nurses Association's Hall of Fame.

"My years of work in these critical areas allow me to recognize progress and great leadership and we know that this type of collaboration has been successful nationally," remarked Barlow.

"Police are often the ones dispatched to emergency mental health calls, but even when officers are trained in de-escalation techniques, the insights and expertise of trained clinicians are invaluable. Their expertise can save lives."

Barlow believes that the new program will be successful because it unites an existing, local behavioral health facility with the city's police department so very little needs to be added to make it work. If the pilot program is a success, Barlow hopes that it will become permanent and join other programs around the country as a model of modern, effective criminal justice reform.

"This important APD and Aspire collaboration will generate new ideas and programs, and it may save lives," added Barlow. "Chief Persley's leadership in this innovative new partnership is the type of substantive criminal justice reform that will help keep our community safe."

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