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## Madison Finance Committee to consider crisis response funding Monday

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PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

Dane County Boys and Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson speaks during a press conference ahead of approval of the 2017 budget. The budget includes \$400,000 to implement the Focused Interruption Coalition's 15-point plan to reduce violence and recidivism. At its meeting Monday, Madison's Finance Committee will discuss authorizing \$50,000 of that funding for short-term peer support and crisis services.

Faced with Madison's rising record of violence, the city is considering spending \$50,000 to fund crisis response services and short term peer support.

The funding comes from \$400,000 included in the 2017 operating budget earmarked for implementing aspects of the grassroots Focused Interruption Coalition's 15-point violence and recidivism reduction plan.

Madison's Finance Committee is scheduled to discuss the funding at its 4:30 p.m. meeting Monday in room 354 of the City-County Building, 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. The resolution authorizes a contract between the city and Nehemiah Community Development Corporation, which would subcontract with the Focused Interruption Coalition and the Dane County Boys and Girls Club.

If approved, "the resolution tonight, I would say, is a step in the right direction," Boys and Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson said.

Another organization that has been providing crisis response services for decades is the Dane County District Attorney's Crime Victim Services unit. The team provides early response services on a 24/7 basis after a call from the police department, medical examiner's office, local hospitals, social workers or sometimes even residents.

"There's not a serious crime that occurs that we don't get a call from someone," unit manager Julie Foley said. "Our response is crime victim focused, so we are really attempting to meet the needs of crime victims in every aspect."

Foley and her coworkers work with those affected by the incident to determine needs, which can include finding temporary housing, access to possessions like phones if they have been taken into custody and assisting with funeral costs.

The public dialogue around FIC's rapid response measures has been concerning to Foley because she does not want the community to think that her unit is not doing its job.

"It's been a little bit frustrating and exasperating that there's the suggestion that nothing is going on," Foley said.

The Crime Victim Services unit can pay for immediate needs individuals may have through the federal Crime Victim Compensation fund, administered by the state Department of Justice. However, individuals who are deemed to have contributed to the crime at hand are not eligible.

Mayor Paul Soglin said the city's funding would be used beyond victims of crimes.

"It would involve witnesses, could involve friends of victims or friends of assailants," Soglin said. "The scope is far broader."

While Community Development Division director Jim O'Keefe acknowledged the services may overlap, he said the city intends to work closely with the Crime Victim Services unit.

"We see the city's effort as being complementary to efforts that are already being made through the Crime Victims Services unit," O'Keefe said.

The city will continue to develop a request for proposals for a service provider to offer more comprehensive peer support for people who have been exposed to violence or who could be at greater risk of engaging in violent behavior.

O'Keefe said the short-term crisis response funding targets the "microlevel": addressing needs of specific people involved in violent incidents that occur this summer. However, he said the goal is to eventually combine that with the peer support program still being identified.

Johnson said the community rapid response team will coordinate with the Crime Victims Services unit to be the most efficient. Developing trust with victims is crucial to getting their needs met, and Johnson said a group identifying as part of the district attorney's office may not be welcomed as quickly as someone from the community.

"When there's a local pastor or community leader from that community, they can be that bridge builder between the family and the district attorney's office and the police department, the mayor's office, Johnson said. "You've got to have somebody that can connect all of those dots."

Foley acknowledged there are community groups and leaders who may be more trusted than her unit, which could benefit from more diversity. Developing trust to meet the practical needs of victims is a priority, she said.

“If there’s somebody out there that is more trusted or have an established relationship, that can only benefit our unit and the person trying to recover from the tragedy," Foley said.

Foley called the increase in crime and types of violent crimes “another world.” When corresponding with other members of her team, she said it can be hard to keep track of all the ongoing incidents.

“There’s too much volume and too many safety concerns not to coordinate,” Foley said.

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## Abigail Becker

Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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