



CORRECT CRISIS INTERVENTION TODAY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Advocates Joined by City Council Member Richardson Jordan, Deputy Public Advocate Acevedo, and a rep for Council Member Hanif at Rally Calling on New York to Implement Non-Police Response to Mental Health Crisis Calls

— The event commemorated 5-Year Anniversary of Miguel Richards' Death —

For B Roll Video from Rally: [click here](#)

(NEW YORK)— Today, members of the [Correct Crisis Intervention Today in New York City \(CCIT-NYC\)](#) coalition (including Community Access, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and NAMI-NYC), gathered with **City Council Member Kristin Richardson Jordan, Deputy Public Advocate Solomon Acevedo**, and a representative from **Council Member Shahana Hanif's** office, along with other concerned New Yorkers and community-based organizations including Freedom Agenda, Exodus, Women's Community Justice Association, and the Supportive Housing Network of New York to commemorate the five-year anniversary of the killing of Miguel Richards. In his memory, advocates rallied to call for a crisis response led by peers with lived mental health experience to replace the current police-led response that has left far too many New Yorkers injured, traumatized, or dead.

"We can get to a place where, instead of having a violent response to those who are in need, we have a care community response. Such an alternative is possible, attainable, and doable," said **Council Member Richardson Jordan** in her remarks at today's rally.

"I hope and trust no parents should ever bear such enormous pain because of persons who are there to serve and protect," says **Belvett Richards**, father of Miguel Richards.

Richards was shot and killed in the Bronx in September of 2017 by the NYPD, who believed he was experiencing a mental health crisis, while he stood perfectly still and silent throughout the fatal encounter.

Despite the City's attempts to reform the system through the B-HEARD pilot, the pilot's [data](#) reveal the failure of an alternative response system that does not center peers with lived experience and instead continues the City's dangerous over-reliance on NYPD to respond to people in crisis. The CCIT-NYC coalition continues to call for a crisis response system that is peer-led, city-wide, and operates 24/7, with response times that are comparable to other NYC emergency response systems.

"The city must stop criminalizing mental health crises, especially in communities of color already subject to an unjust system of over-policing. We urge city leaders to work with CCIT-NYC to adapt the B-HEARD model to include peers with lived experience as trained first responders and to stop deploying NYPD for mental health crisis calls."

• **Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access**

"New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) joins its fellow CCIT-NYC member organizations in emphatically calling for the transformation of New York's mental health

crisis responses. Far too many people have been irreparably injured and died at the hands of the police, who simply are not suited to provide the needed healthcare response to a health crisis. We will not stand idly by; New York must adopt CCIT-NYC's model, which centers the role of the peer with lived mental health experience – NOW!"

• **Ruth Lowenkron, Esq., Director of NYLPI's Disability Justice Program**

"We know from evidence, as well as through a series of conversations with different impacted community members across New York City, that it is past due for our city government to implement a similar CAHOOTS approach to crisis response in NYC, consisting of one trained peer crisis worker and one independent medic, that could save countless lives."

• **Matt Kudish, LMSW, MPA, Executive Director of National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC)**

"This month we observe the anniversary of the death of our brother Miguel, who died needlessly because New York City police officers were too afraid to simply let him stand, alone, in his own apartment. Our society and values as expressed in the Constitution cannot tolerate impunity for officers who open fire on people who don't respond to them, or who behave in ways the officers are unfamiliar with. As our country faces its greatest crisis in mental health in medical history, changing how we respond to acute mental health episodes is more important than ever. Our office, ZMO Law PLLC, and the Law Offices of Daniel A. McGuinness, are proud to stand with Miguel's family to try to obtain justice for this tragedy."

• **Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma, Attorney and Counsellor at Law**

"Our city has allowed Rikers Island to be the de facto and inadequate provider of mental health services for many incarcerated individuals who never got treatment in the community. My 20-year-old nephew is sitting on Rikers right now in dire need of mental health care and healing."

• **Ashley Conrad, Freedom Agenda Community Organizer**

"Exodus Transitional Community (Exodus) is a preventative, reentry and advocacy organization that serves over 3,400 justice-impacted people in community each year, as well as over 10,000 people who are detained or incarcerated on Rikers Island. Many of the people we serve suffer from mental health and have had negative experiences with police. We have an opportunity to improve B-HEARD to ensure all New Yorkers suffering from mental health get the help they need when they are in crisis. Together, we can invest in a more robust system to meet the needs of all New Yorkers."

• **Kandra Clark, Exodus Transitional Community VP of Policy & Strategy**

"Experiencing a mental health crisis is not a crime, and it certainly should not – and must not – be a death sentence. New Yorkers in crisis deserve and need a compassionate response from trained peers who understand their lived experience, not law enforcement, whose presence only increases the chances of a needlessly tragic ending. The city's B-HEARD pilot program is a step in the right direction. But much more is needed – eliminating police from the program, making it 24/7 and citywide, as well as prevention in the form of supportive housing that provides individuals with the services they need to build stable, healthy lives. To honor the memory of Miguel Richards, and ensure not one more New Yorker is mistreated, abused, or killed, we urge the City to work collaboratively with CCIT-NYC, a coalition of peers with lived experience, providers, and other advocates, to improve B-HEARD, and prioritize investment in more supportive housing to prevent mental health crises before they occur."

• **Pascale Leone, Executive Director, the Supportive Housing Network of New York**

"Women's Community Justice Association advocates for women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island, and there is a clear pipeline to jail for those with mental illness. At Rosie's, 82 percent have a mental health diagnosis and 27 percent have serious mental illness. A peer-model of crisis response and more community-based care would help break the cycle of incarceration at Rosie's that can worsen mental illness and tear families apart."

• **Leah Faria, WCJA Task Force + Community Organizer**

“New York City's experience, both recent and over the years, has provided painful evidence that sending NYPD officers in response to New Yorkers in psychiatric crises is neither effective nor safe. In some cases, the actions of the police have led directly to the deaths of people in need and in crisis. We urge our policymakers to institute an alternative system, as other jurisdictions in the nation have done, that eliminates police entirely from the process and depends instead on peer counselors trained to handle such urgent situations humanely and effectively. SAVE LIVES, NOT TAKE THEM.”

• **Robert Gangi, Director of Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP).**

"The police and the government need to stop criminalizing mental health. A mental health crisis should not lead to incarceration or worse, death. We as peers and the communities we live in can handle our brothers and sisters that are going through crisis. We don't need police that tend to escalate a crisis and not diffuse it."

• **Michael Nugent, Program Director/Senior Peer Baltic Street AEH, Inc.**

ABOUT CORRECT CRISIS INTERVENTION TODAY NEW YORK CITY (CCIT-NYC):

[CCIT-NYC](#) is a coalition of [more than 80 mental health advocacy and other community organizations](#), consisting of hundreds of community stakeholders, working to transform how New York City responds to mental health crises. CCIT-NYC has proposed a mental health crisis response system that replaces police with teams of trained peer specialists and independent emergency medical technicians, based on input from two 100-plus-member community focus groups and a review of relevant research. For more information about CCIT-NYC and its proposal, visit <http://www.ccitnyc.org/who-we-are/our-proposal>.

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