

Sheppard Mullin and the ACLU File Second Lawsuit Challenging Police Responses to Mental Health Emergencies

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Sheppard Mullin, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the ACLU of Oregon and Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) filed a federal lawsuit today alleging that Washington County's practice of sending armed police instead of trained mental health professionals to respond to mental health emergencies violates the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The lawsuit alleges that the county's police response to mental health emergencies not only denies people with disabilities access to the county's emergency programs and services, but is also ineffective and dangerous. "Ultimately, this lawsuit aims to correct the misconception that people experiencing mental health crises are dangerous and require a law enforcement response," explains Daniel Bartz, ACLU of Oregon Senior Counsel. "People in crisis should receive the care that they need and deserve, rather than being treated as though they committed a crime."

Sheppard Mullin is also co-counsel with the ACLU in a pending federal case challenging the District of Columbia's practice of sending police, rather than mental health providers, to respond to mental health crises. "We are proud to partner again with the ACLU to bring an end to this counterproductive and dangerous practice, and to protect the rights of people with disabilities," said Sheppard Mullin pro bono partner Dan Brown.

"Everyone deserves access to healthcare during an emergency—that includes emergency mental health services during a crisis," said Jake Cornett, Executive Director and CEO of Disability Rights Oregon. "Police are neither trained nor appropriate responders for someone who has broken their leg and calls 911—and the same holds for someone having a mental health emergency."

The lawsuit seeks to improve how Washington County responds to people with mental health disabilities in crisis by sufficiently funding, staffing and integrating the County's non-police response teams into the 911 dispatch system. Non-police responders would then become the primary, default mental health emergency responders, rather than police.

The lawsuit was filed by a team of attorneys at DRO, ACLU of Oregon, ACLU and Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP. Disability Rights Oregon is also an organizational plaintiff.

[Read the complaint here.](#)

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