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Northampton to Receive \$450,000 Equitable Alternatives to Policing Strategies Grant in Support of its Division of Community Care

NORTHAMPTON - Today, Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra, in partnership with Senator Jo Comerford (Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester District), announced that the City of Northampton has secured a \$450,000 grant under the Department of Public Health's Equitable Approaches to Public Safety (EAPS) grant program. The funds will be used by Northampton's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to support the Division of Community Care (DCC) as they work to implement alternative responses to some types of public safety calls in the City of Northampton.

"I am so grateful to the Department of Public Health, the State Legislature, and especially Senator Comerford for bringing this important source of funding back to life for Northampton," said Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra, "Senator Comerford recognized the value of our efforts to build the Division of Community Care, and worked hard to convince the Commonwealth that our model is one in which they should invest."

Northampton originally applied for the EAPS grant program in the summer of 2020, but was not selected, because Northampton's public health-based approach to alternatives to public safety response did not fit the grant's initial guidelines. Senator Comerford spent considerable effort helping the Department of Public Health understand the merits of Northampton's approach, and helped convince the state legislature to provide additional funding with Northampton in mind.

"When the original awards were announced, I was so happy for those who received them, but very surprised that Northampton, in its thoughtful innovation through the Department of Community Care, received no funding," shared Senator Jo Comerford, "It has been my honor to help the Department of Public Health understand Northampton's innovative approach here, and to help ensure there was funding to support it."

The EAPS grant is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) in recognition of the impacts that public safety outcomes have on individual and community

health. This is a multi-year grant awarded to municipalities which have strong community engagement and which are implementing or expanding a public safety reform that provides a measurable benefit to public health. Among the goals of this program are the decrease in mental health, behavioral health or other public health needs in the community as well as an increase in equitable public safety outcomes through alternatives to public safety responses and training in de-escalation, racial equity, cultural competency, and social services navigation.

“We are so excited to receive this support from DPH in recognition of and to assist in building these critical services for the people of Northampton,” said Merridith O’Leary, Commissioner of Health and Human Services for the City of Northampton, “We will absolutely use this support to enhance our efforts to rapidly bring the DCC online.”

Mayor Sciarra created the Division of Community Care under the DHHS, in part based on a recommendation the Northampton Policing Review Committee (NPRC) delivered in its March 2021 final report entitled [Reimagining Safety](#). The NPRC was appointed by former Mayor Narkewicz and then-City Council President Sciarra, and charged to explore alternate solutions for public safety responses in certain cases. The committee recommended the establishment of a new “Northampton Department of Community Care” to provide multiple types of civilian responders to community needs, including peer response to mental health and substance use crises, as an alternative public safety response. The city hired an interim director to lead the development of the division in December of 2021, and moved the division under Health and Human Services in the spring of 2022.

For more information, contact the Mayor’s Office at 413-587-1249 or mayor@northamptonma.gov.