



March 4, 2025

**Ohio House of Representatives Public Safety Committee  
Testimony of Patrick Sweeney, Chief of Fire, City of Shaker Heights**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and distinguished members of the House Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Patrick Sweeney and I am the Fire Chief for the City of Shaker Heights, Ohio.

I'm here today with Mayor David Weiss to respectfully request your support for a **\$400,000 budget allocation for the regional First CALL program – a crisis intervention team model**. Through this program, five neighboring communities who already collaborate emergency response in the same regional dispatch center are now also collaborating to improve response to mental health emergencies.

In Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, Richmond Heights, South Euclid and University Heights, mental health professionals are now serving alongside police and fire personnel to assist us with those emergency calls. These clinicians are providing crisis de-escalation, service connections, and follow-up care.

The First CALL program also effectively trains our first responders on mental health disorders, de-escalation techniques, emergency admission procedures, available community resources, and many other topics.

The social worker and first responders work as a team to assist our neighbors in crisis and achieve the best possible outcome. Adding social workers to our teams allows police and fire first responders to concentrate where we are most needed. We are more effectively and efficiently addressing the needs of the individual and the greater community by providing the right service at the right time.

Our cities and departments have invested in this program because the results demonstrate its success. For example, the program is eliminating some repeat 9-1-1 calls from residents who simply were not connected to the resources they need – resources that are already available in our community.

**The Divisions of Police and Fire in our First CALL cities are committed to this important alternative crisis response effort. It is a critical piece of our public safety agenda.** Our first responder teams are more effective and efficient when we leverage the expertise of licensed mental health professionals to better assist individuals in crisis and link them to the best resources and services in the community.

I respectfully request your support for a budget amendment of \$400,000 to sustain and advance the regional First CALL Program in Cuyahoga County.

Thank you.