



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES - REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024, 1:00 PM

The Special Commission for Safe Communities convened in regular session at 1:00 PM, March 28, 2024. Chairman Denton called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Timothy Harris	Commissioner	Present
Scott Denton	Chairman	Present
Elizabeth German	Vice Chairperson	Present
Aron Klein	Commissioner	Present
Cathy Lust	Commissioner	Present
Kaitlyn Selman	Commissioner	Present
Jay Shannon	Commissioner	Absent

Public Comment

The following individual provided in person public comment: (1) Surena Fish. No emailed public comment was received.

Approval of Minutes

No minutes presented to approve.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

Item 5.A. Presentation and discussion by Coroner Yoder regarding gun violence as it relates to suicides in McLean County.

Dr. Yoder provided a statistical summary of deaths by suicide in McLean County from 2015 through 2023. Dr. Yoder included some additional, non-statistical data as well.

The McLean County Coroner's Office was involved with any death in the county deemed unnatural or suspicious. A death was considered a suicide if it was the result of injury or poison.

Dr. Yoder said some people have the misconception that there was an increase in suicides during COVID, which was statistically inaccurate. Research has shown that focus should not be on method as much as the suicidal ideation.

Overall, gun crimes were down in Bloomington-Normal, and in the past 9 years, suicide by gunshot has been less frequent than other manners of suicide. The percentage of deaths which occurred by suicide remained steady during 2015 through 2023 and did not correlate to COVID. From 2015- 2023, the majority of suicides occurred by a means other than firearms. There were consistently more suicides among middle-aged males than any other demographic group. The percentage of suicides by firearm compared to other means was presented as follows:

Year	Percentage of Suicides by Gunshot	Percentage of suicides by Other Means
2015	26%	74%
2016	24%	76%
2017	37%	63%
2018	32%	81%
2019	39%	61%
2020	63%	37%
2021	41%	59%
2022	24%	76%
2023	62%	38%

From 2016-2023, the McLean County Coroner's Office was involved with 11,220 death investigations. In 2023, there were 1,405 deaths reports to the McLean County Coroner's Office. Of the 1,405 deaths, most people died a natural death; 48 were elderly fall deaths; 23 were overdose deaths; 21 deaths were the result of motor vehicle accidents; and 5 were the result of homicide.

In 2023, drug and alcohol involvement were tracked. In 2023, alcohol and/or drugs were detected in the systems of 69% of suicide victims.

Dr. Yoder referenced Erik Erickson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, a theory that outlined the stages of resolving conflict throughout life and how they correlated to suicidal ideation. In young adulthood, people experienced the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation; they tried to establish relationships or may have been experiencing bullying and preoccupation with whether they were popular. The conflict of Generativity vs. Stagnation occurred during middle age, with concerns about whether their job and/or marriage are "working", was their lifestyle working, and/or were they be able to retire. As previously mentioned, the highest prevalence of suicide victims were middle-aged males. The conflict of Integrity vs. Despair occurred during old age. Older people who have suicidal ideation tended to be focused on their health. With "Right to Die" bills passed in some states across the country and legislation for this being explored in Illinois, some of the older population with suicidal ideation may have felt like they were a burden on their family or suffered from mental health crisis.

Dr. Yoder stated the community needs to learn how to recognize the signs of suicidal ideation and understand the psychosocial conflict(s) the person may have been experiencing. If we asked someone if they have a plan and they do, we could work to remove that option from the person's reach. Guns are just one method by which people take their own lives.

Commissioner Lust asked Dr. Yoder if there was a way to differentiate between intentional and unintentional death by drug overdose. The response was that intention regarding drug overdose was too hard to differentiate.

Commissioner Lust asked Dr. Yoder if the coroner's office does any type of follow-up when deaths were determined to be a suicide. Dr. Yoder indicated that her officer regularly reached out during and after death investigations to families and loved ones, including suicides. She stated that it takes 4-6 weeks to close a coroner's case and during that time they have long discussions with family members.

Dr. Yoder mentioned the suicide hotline number was 988.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.B. Presentation and discussion by Path Interim CEO Dr. Adam Carter regarding resources and information on how PATH resources are and can be used to address local gun violence.

Dr. Carter provided information regarding what PATH does and how it handles clients with suicidal ideation.

Dr. Carter expressed appreciation for being invited into the conversation and began the presentation by noting there are three emergency services phone numbers people can use in Illinois:

- 911, for medical and public safety emergencies
- 988, for suicide prevention and mental health crises
- 211, a resource support line

PATH answers calls coming into both 988 and 211. Dr. Carter stated that 52% of the State of Illinois was served by PATH. 988 was a state-level hotline. Calls to 988 are routed to one of the 7 call centers within Illinois based on the first digits of the phone number that was calling the hotline. This was an effort to connect the caller to the most local resources possible. PATH / 211 are at a community level and connect people to their local resources.

Dr. Carter indicated that 47.6% of suicide attempts take place within 10 minutes of a person having a suicidal thought. The concern related to firearms was if a gun was on the premises with a person having suicidal ideation, they have an immediate means by which to act on the ideation. The action of suicide increased if there was a firearm on the premises. Within the age brackets of 10-24 years of age and 25-44 years of age, deaths involving guns are more likely to be homicides than suicides. Within the age brackets of 45-64 years of age and 65+ age brackets, the statistics switch and firearm suicides increase while firearm homicides decrease.

On a federal level, gun suicides have continued to climb nationwide. In 2006, guns were involved with 5.55 percent per 100,000 capita of suicides; in 2022, that percent had climbed to 7.65 per 100,000 capita.

Dr. Carter indicated the Gun Deaths Report in Illinois, which was available online, shows that the two groups most linked to suicide by gunshot are the 45-64 year and 65+ year age

groups. Suicides involving guns within these two age groups have been higher than deaths by homicide or accident.

PATH was in Year Two of being involved with 988, which was the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. In its first year of involvement with 988, PATH handled 130,000 calls. What PATH / 988 seek to provide callers is: Someone to talk to; Someone to respond; Somewhere to go.

Notes provided regarding 988:

- The 988 line was anonymous.
- The average 988 call lasted 25 minutes.
- PATH sought to deescalate calls to take the burden off of 911.
- PATH could connect calls to a mobile crisis team and/or community resources.
- PATH was in the 90th percentile of deescalating crisis situations.
- The initial goal on calls was to connect with the caller and find out the following information:
 - Does the caller express a desire to die?
 - Does the caller have a plan for dying?
 - Does the caller have the means with which to kill themselves?
- The 988-operator sought to understand the caller by listening to the caller and forming a safety plan for them.
- The 988 operators offered a follow-up call, whether that be in 2 minutes, 2 hours, 2 days, or whatever the caller needs. Every caller receives at least 2 follow-up calls.
- The operator could also offer to meet the caller where they are at, whether that be at home or a public place. This was the "Program 590 Team", which was "border to border" mobile crisis coverage. The goal of the mobile crisis team was to deescalate and connect the caller to resources. The team does not wear uniforms and the caller was notified that someone was coming to meet them, so they were not surprised.
- Physical locations, which are designed not to look like medical facilities, that PATH 988 operators can assist callers include:
 - Two Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC) facilities in Illinois
 - "Living Room" programs, where a facility was designed to look like a living room.
 - Advanced medical care was available if needed.

Vice Chairperson German (~57:00) asked Dr. Carter what the number one need was for PATH / 988 if funding was not an issue. Dr. Carter responded that the number one need was people. Staff turnover was high. Dr. Carter stated that the job was extremely difficult because what they are asking people who work at PATH / 988 to do was to come into work and possibly listen to people die over the phone.

Commissioner Lust asked if the line was staffed by all volunteers. 988 was staffed by paid employees who have had qualified mental health training, while the 211 hotline was staffed by volunteers. 211 was no longer answering suicide calls; they are warm transferred to 988.

Chairman Denton asked how the community can get people to call 988. Dr. Carter replied that it would help to normalize conversations about mental health and that their goal was also not to involve law enforcement because currently there are still people who worry they will get in trouble if they see someone in uniform when they call a crisis hotline.

Dr. Carter also shared the following:

- Age seemed to be a bigger indicator of who will use the hotlines than sex and gender.
- Middle-aged men were the least likely to call 988.
- Call volume increased after the traditional 9-5 workday and dropped off after 1 am.
- Call volume increased the day or two following a holiday.

Commissioner Harris asked if PATH was open to connecting to groups within the community, such as faith-based groups, to join the conversation and help with normalizing mental health discussions.

Vice Chairperson German (1:08:07) asked if the group that includes middle-aged men was more comfortable with seeking therapy. Dr. Carter indicated that did not seem to be the case. The younger generations are more interested in seeking resources to assist them in handling trauma.

When further asked how the community could "fast track" normalization, Dr. Carter suggested using social media. Dr. Carter indicated they have developed a Youth Advisory Council for reaching children and teens.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.C. Presentation and discussion by Asst. Chief Veerman on the current status of gun violence in the Bloomington Normal area.

Asst. Chief Veerman indicated that the status of shootings in the community was one in March, with no reported injuries. As of the date of this meeting, there had been 16 shootings in 2024. In March, BPD seized three handguns and one rifle.

New Business

Regarding Surena Fish's question about the focus of the commission and whether the mission has changed, Commissioner Lust indicated that the commission was originally going to be named the "Gun Violence Commission".

Ms. Fish asked if copies of the presentations would be made available. Commissioner Denton indicated he would ask Dr. Yoder if she would provide her presentation. Dr. Carter indicated he would provide his presentation.

Commission Member Comments

No Commissioner Member Comments were given.

Adjournment

Vice Chairperson German made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Denton, to adjourn the meeting.

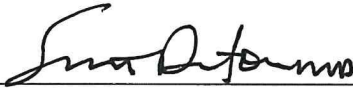
Chairman Denton directed the staff liaison to call roll:

AYES: Selman; Lust; Klein; German; Denton; Harris

Motion carried (viva voce).

The Meeting Adjourned at 1:49 PM

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



Scott Denton, Chairman



Aaron Veerman, Staff Liaison