

**ANNOUNCEMENT and MEDIA RELEASE**  
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\*\*\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\*\*\*

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**CITY and COUNTY WILL EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES in  
COLLABORATION with SENTARA/RMH and COMMUNITY SERVICES  
BOARD**

City Manager Kurt Hodgen and County Administrator Joe Paxton announced today that the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) has awarded new state funding to open a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Assessment Center. This is a collaborative mental health and criminal justice program involving the City of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, Sentara RMH Medical Center, and the Harrisonburg-

Rockingham Community Services Board. The CIT Assessment Center will be located within the Emergency Department at Sentara RMH Medical Center, with mental health assessment services provided by the Community Services Board. State funding in year one will total \$208,824, and thereafter on-going annual state funding of \$166,108 will be matched with \$71,190 in local government funds. CIT Assessment Centers provide a therapeutic location that can serve as an alternative to a custodial arrest, where authorized law enforcement officers can take individuals experiencing an acute or sub-acute mental health crisis. With the current level of funding, the Assessment Center will operate each weekday evening from 4:00 p.m. until midnight. During these times, there will be immediate access and transfer of custody of mental health consumers to qualified Assessment Center personnel for emergency clinical assessments, necessary medical screenings, mental health referrals, and linkage to appropriate treatment services in a safe environment.

This innovative program represents the latest phase of interagency planning and partnerships coming from the local Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Task Force which was created in 2013 by the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Task Force members include representatives from the Harrisonburg Police Department, Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, Rockingham-Harrisonburg Court Services Unit, the Office of the Magistrate, and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board. The CIT model is nationally recognized for improving interactions between law enforcement and individuals experiencing acute episodes of mental illness. Law enforcement personnel participate in a 40-hour training program designed to educate and prepare them to interact

with individuals in crisis, so that officers can recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness while responding effectively and safely. Locally, over 134 criminal justice personnel have completed this extensive training. An Assessment Center has been one of the primary goals of CIT Task Force members for some time because the Center can function as an alternative to incarceration, plus allow efficient “transfer of custody” so that officers can promptly return to their routine law enforcement duties.

The Sentara RMH Emergency Department has played a vital and collaborative role for many years in meeting the needs of area residents experiencing a mental health crisis, and local government officials are praising Sentara RMH Medical Center President Jim Krauss and his team for providing the physical space and access to RMH medical personnel that will be critical to the success of the new CIT Assessment Center. City Manager Kurt Hodgen said “This is the type of wonderful community partnership that will help so many local residents. It leverages healthcare resources and braids together funding in support of our on-going efforts to divert individuals from the local criminal justice system when their real need is for mental health treatment. Bottom line, the CIT Assessment Center would not be a reality without the leadership, commitment, and community teamwork displayed by Sentara RMH officials.” If the program proves successful as it has in other areas of the state, Hodgen anticipates that additional state funding could be awarded in the future to increase the hours of operation. Virginia’s stated goal is for every Assessment Center to eventually operate twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

The CSB Board of Directors recently approved providing these expanded mental health services at the Sentara RMH location. The CSB will hire a certified mental health clinician and a peer support specialist to staff the CIT Assessment Center, and they will be joined by a contracted law enforcement officer trained and certified in the CIT model. The law enforcement officer's primary function is to maintain security and safety of the Assessment Center, and to take custody of any individual when appropriate under the Code of Virginia. The CSB plans to have the Center open by early December. In finalizing the locality's proposal that led to the new state funding, CSB Executive Director Lacy Whitmore was very pleased with the many Letters of Support that were provided by community partners. Whitmore said, "Without the interagency and community involvement as part of our funding application, I have no doubt this new state funding would have gone elsewhere."

\*\*\*\*\* **END OF RELEASE** \*\*\*\*\*