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# Harrisonburg Police Department Hires Mental Health Co-responder to Improve Crisis Response

**Harrisonburg, VA- September 19, 2025-** The Harrisonburg Police Department (HPD) is proud to announce the launch of its new co-responder program, with the hiring of a Co-Responder Mental Health Clinician to respond alongside officers to crisis-related calls-for-service.

Calls involving behavioral health issues are among HPD's most frequent calls for service, often requiring multiple officers and extended response times. Once fully operational, this program will allow our clinician to respond with officers to behavioral health-related calls to de-escalate crises, reduce arrests and hospitalizations, and connect individuals to treatment and support while improving service delivery and community outcomes. This program was created through the 2023 Bureau of Justice Assistance Connect and Protect Grant.

Program Goals:

- Connect people in crisis to mental health and substance use services
- Provide follow-up after release from hospitals or jails
- Enhance officer training on mental health response
- Improve data sharing across local mental health and justice partners

HPD is working closely with partner agencies such as the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board, Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, Harrisonburg Fire Department, and James Madison University to ensure a coordinated and compassionate response across Harrisonburg.

September 14-20 is National Co-Responder and Crisis Responder Week. The International Co-Responder Alliance created this week of recognition in 2023, and we are excited to celebrate this week by welcoming Raz Ahmed to HPD to serve in this role. The week celebrates the many co-responders and crisis responders carrying out this important work across the country, while trying to meet the rising demand for mental health and substance use services.

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Ms. Ahmed was recently hired as the Clinician of the Behavioral Health Unit and is currently in the onboarding process to complete training and begin service delivery as a co-responder. Ms. Ahmed holds a master's degree in social work and has worked previously in the healthcare field in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham area.

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