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Thank you, Chairwoman DeLauro. It is a true honor and privilege to be here with you today. My name is Chris Richardson and I currently serve as the Associate Director of Criminal Justice Services at the Mental Health Center of Denver, a non-profit, community mental health provider known nationally as a model for innovative care. We proudly serve the City and County of Denver and support communities in their wellness and recovery.

In my role, I oversee multiple programs that focus on the intersection of mental health and criminal justice. Today, I'd like to talk about one of our programs at the forefront of innovation in mental health crisis response. STAR -- or Support Team Assisted Response -- serves as an alternative to low-risk/ low-acuity 911 calls; many of which are related to substance use and mental health concerns.

Launched June 1st 2020, the STAR Pilot is a partnership between the Mental Health Center of Denver, Denver Health -- one of Colorado's premier healthcare institutions - Denver Police Department, Denver Department of Public Health and Environment as well as community stakeholders like Servicio De Laraza, Harm Reduction Action Center, Denver Justice Project, DASHR, and Caring4Denver.

The intent of STAR is to send the right response - not a one-size fits all – response to people in crisis. People call 911 for an array of reasons -- and it's not always something that presents with a legal nexus. Previously, 911 calls were handled by police, fire or emergency medical services. Denver took steps to look at how to best meet the needs of a community and added the STAR program to the emergency response system.

Here's how it works:

Dressed in street clothes, we provide direct clinical de-escalation, community service connections as well as on-demand resources such as water, food, clothing and basic living supports. Our team helps the emergency response system handle the overwhelming number of 911 calls that don't require a police response.

When STAR pulls up, the individual can be assured that the interaction is grounded in a harm reduction, trauma-informed philosophy with people able to creatively meet whatever need they are presenting to maximize long-term support.

If the STAR program can handle someone in crisis and that frees up police to handle a robbery or domestic violence call -- then that's an incredible success.

We are seeing results. Paradigm shift results.

Over the past 11 months, STAR has successfully responded to 1,323 calls. Of those, there has not been a single arrest, no injuries and no need for police back up.

Let me repeat that. Not a single one of the calls resulted in the need for police response.

The STAR team has the knowledge of social programs and resources to more easily help people in crisis and connect them to care. While not all calls have a diagnosable mental health condition, many individuals identify as experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia, bipolar, anxiety, and major depression that benefit from clinical intervention and community resourcing to best meet their immediate need.

STAR works in cooperation and coordination with Denver Police and other first responders. Like any collaboration, if we need the police on the scene, we trust they will be there to support our efforts and the safety of the community, much like we would support them should they require STAR assistance. They keep an eye out for us and we rely on one another's expertise to serve the community.

In closing, I would like to share a call that we ran last week that demonstrates the need for growth of these programs and how through coordination, collaboration and trust, we can better meet and support the community's needs. STAR was requested by Denver Police to a 7-11 store where a woman was experiencing mental health symptoms and actively refusing to leave the establishment. 7-11 asked that she be classified as a trespasser, but the Denver Police

Department recognized that this was a mental health situation and not criminal in nature. STAR was requested on scene and was quickly able to build rapport with the woman. After a short time she agreed to leave the store and asked to be transported to a local women's day shelter that frequently partners with STAR. During the transport, the woman asked for assistance activating her benefit card. The STAR team provided brief case management and activated the card so she could purchase food and other basic need items -- which, turned out to be the root cause of her issues with the 7-11 interaction. The woman was connected to the day shelter where she could rest, shower and do her laundry and services were set up with housing support established prior to leaving. Additionally, case managers were tagged in and followed-up with her the next morning, bringing her into mental health treatment to build on her recovery and support her in her goals moving forward. Through creative thinking, Denver has taken the next step in supporting the community.

It has been an honor to share the details of how we are using innovation to move the meter on mental health crisis response in Denver. Thank you for your time.