

“The Courts Have Handcuffed Us” Del Norte Sheriff Claims

March 6, 2025



In the wake of Sheriff Garrett Scott's announcement, he will no longer dispatch deputies to non-criminal mental health calls. The Sheriff predicts an uncertain and possibly troubling future in helping those who suffer from mental illness. Scott's resolute criticism of the 9th District Court of Appeals admonishment of law enforcement's role in dealing with the mentally ill and questioned whether law enforcement should be even be involved in de-escalating contentious calls at all.

Sheriff Scott responded, "The need for law enforcement is greater than ever. Violent crimes have increased dramatically since 2019. Our higher courts must support the citizens and give back to law enforcement the ability to protect. Handcuffing law enforcement is not the answer."

The Sheriff praised his deputies and the CCPD who handle some 500 bookings, quarterly. The DNSD responds to over 15,000 calls annually.

Del Norte County has commenced a Mobile Crisis unit with a 9-8-8 crisis number. Scott commits to support Del Norte Mental Health and the Mobile Crisis Unit.

Ranell Brown, Director of Health and Human Services affirmed the launching of the Mobile Crisis Team and Providing Access for Hope(PATH) while working on increasing the team's capacity. "When a call is received, an assessment is completed to determine if it's appropriate for the Mobile Crisis Team to respond. We encourage community members to assist individuals in crisis."

Crescent City Police Chief Richard Griffin mirrored the Sheriff's position and added, "The Crescent City Police Department has implemented a policy of non-response for non- criminal issues with no threat to public safety."

Former Del Norte Sheriff and current District 5 supervisor Dean Wilson also expressed his frustration with the courts. "I'm upset with the ignorance of the courts who fail to realize the reality of small communities (like Del Norte) with the limited mental health resources to address the needs of those in crisis and whom wish to end their lives with weapons. I'm afraid too many times the response will be a phone call as no one is coming to help."

Law enforcement up and down the State echos "hands off" mental health cases. Police fear "suicide by cop" cases. Plumas County Sheriff Greg Hagwood says, "In too many instances, we show up and further aggravate a crisis situation."

On the hand, Ron Lawrence, president of the California Police Chiefs Association said stepping back from suicide calls is "definitely a source of conversation in the law enforcement profession." Lawrence is the Chief in Citrus Heights. Mono, Lake counties and Hemet are also selective in answering calls. Sacramento County has also implemented mental health calls screening.

The recent lethal incident, currently under investigation, may be a suicide by cop case.

Earlier this week, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law AB392, a bill that enacts one of the strongest use-of-force laws in the country (see attached article).