

MENTAL HEALTH UNIT (MHU) OVERVIEW

The mission of the Madison Police Department Mental Health Unit is to provide a coordinated, professional and compassionate police response to individuals affected by mental illness and their families. The Mental Health Unit works collaboratively with partner agencies to achieve improved outcomes for individuals affected by mental illnesses or suffering a crisis by connecting them to needed services and diverting them away from the criminal justice system whenever possible. The goals of the Mental Health Unit are to improve safety for officers and all members of the community and reduce calls for police service related to mental health crises.

MHU's Values

Problem solving: We believe in identifying the underlying issues creating police calls and reducing them.

Collaboration: We engage with partners from across the government, civil society, families and consumers to improve systems, relationships, and outcomes.

Diversion: We aim to reduce the involvement of criminal justice in mental health issues and the criminalization of mental illness.

Professional development: We seek increased knowledge and expertise within the unit and to share our knowledge and experience with the department at large.



MHU-LED TRAININGS IN 2025

The MHU Sergeant, Mental Health Officers (MHOs) and Law Enforcement Embedded Crisis Workers (LECWs) collaboratively developed and implemented two, eight hour, in-person trainings for Mental Health Liaison Officers (MHLOs) in 2025. At these trainings, we also hosted the Community Alternative Response Emergency Services (CARES) team, and members of the University of Wisconsin Police Department, Fitchburg Police Department, Dane County Sheriff's Office, and Sun Prairie Police Department.

Our Spring 2025 training topics included: Jail Mental Health Resources (Wellpath); Competency in Criminal Court Proceedings and Treatment-to-Competency (Wisconsin Department of Health Services); Veterans Resources (Veterans Affairs); and Barriers to Medical Compliance.

Our Fall 2025 training topics included: Medically Significant Behavior and Chemical Restraints (Madison Fire Department); Youth Court Systems (Dane County Youth Justice workers, Dane County Juvenile Reception Center, Dane County Shelter Home); Vulnerable Adult Resources (Adult Protective Services, Aging and Disability Resource Center); and Officer Wellness activities.

MHU'S NATIONAL LEARNING SITE ACTIVITY IN 2025

In 2025, **MPD's MHU was one of only fifteen Police-Mental Health Collaboration (PMHC) learning sites selected by the Council of State Governments Justice Center.** As a learning site, our unit fields inquiries and hosts visitors from law enforcement agencies around the county who seek support to begin or advance behavioral health units of their own.

This year's learning site activities included several community-based presentations that our unit did, under the "Partnering with Law Enforcement" educational series. This is the third year that we have offered 60-75 minute presentations to various community-based organizations, free of charge.

In March of 2025, our unit presented for the MPD Community Academy in what was called "behavioral health night". Attendees learned about: the MHU, the CARES team, Journey Mental Health's services generally, MARI, and our training techniques on professional communication and de-escalation.

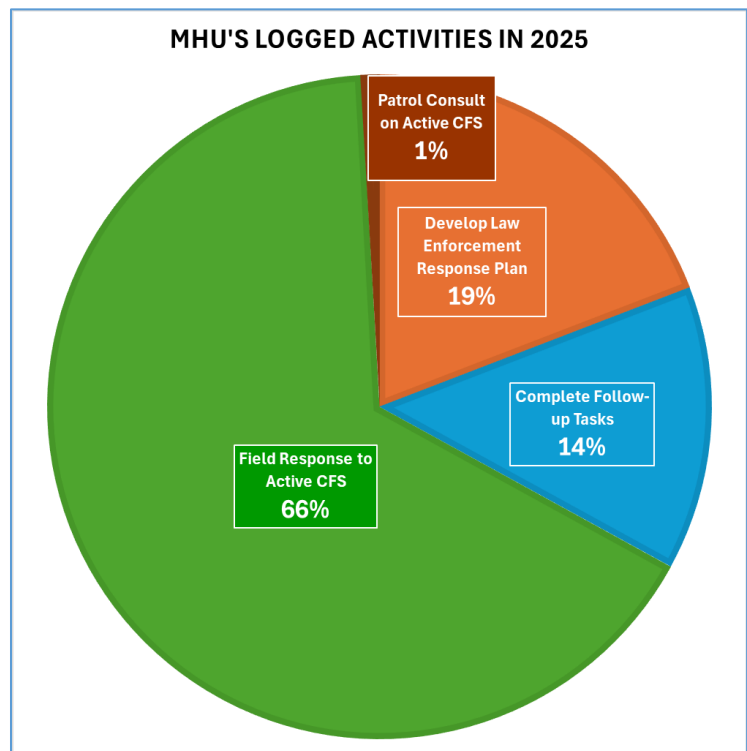
In April of 2025, we hosted a member of Ann Arbor Police Department for a collaborative crisis team site visit. As part of the site visit, we covered various operational features of our MHU and we supported the officer who was soon to start a behavioral health unit within her department.

MHU'S WORKLOAD IN 2025

In 2025, on-duty MHOs and LECWs responded to 561 unique calls-for-service (CFS). Some of these calls were completely diverted from MPD patrol officers, while other calls were instances where MHU members supported, assisted or relieved patrol officers assigned to the call.

Additionally in 2025, **MHOs and LECWs collaboratively logged 327 distinct work activities, serving 207 distinct individuals.** Activities included co-responding to active patrol calls, diverting calls from patrol, completing Chapter 51 conveyances, facilitating crisis assessments, completing follow-up activities of various duration, creating or editing law enforcement response plans for community members, and other joint outreach activities. Collaborative outreach to community members often takes place at the request of concerned service providers or family members, or soon after a call that generated police contact. Outreach is done with the objectives of connecting the individual with community-based resources and discussing safety or treatment-related goals and strategies.

The chart on this page illustrates MHU workload percentages, based on logged activities. The workload reflected in this chart incorporates the CFS data mentioned in the first paragraph of this section.



FREQUENCY RELATED TO INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING MHU SERVICES

The following statistics relate to all 2025 logged activities that our MHOs and LECWs engaged in with individuals in our community:

- Approximately **10.7% of the total activities were directed to the top five individuals** receiving MHU logged activities.
- The **individual who received the most MHU logged activities was 8.**
- The **top 50% most-frequently contacted individuals received a total of approximately 69% of all MHU activity**, and the **top 10% received approximately 28% of all MHU activity.**
- 70.5% of individuals whose cases came to the attention of the MHU received only one activity.
- The **average individual received 1.6 logged MHU activities.** Excluding individuals who received just one contact, the average logged activities per individual was 3.0.

MPD'S CHAPTER 51 ACTIVITY IN 2025

Wisconsin statutes authorize law enforcement officers to take a person into custody to pursue an Emergency Detention (ED) when certain circumstances apply. To initiate an ED, officers must be able to articulate witnessed behavior that meets a "dangerousness" standard; they must reasonably believe that the individual is mentally ill, drug dependent, or developmentally disabled; and they must believe that pursuing an ED is the least restrictive disposition appropriate to the person's needs. Even when all these factors apply, many individuals who experience crisis seek voluntary treatment, so an ED is not appropriate. **In 2025, MPD officers completed 225 Emergency Detentions.**

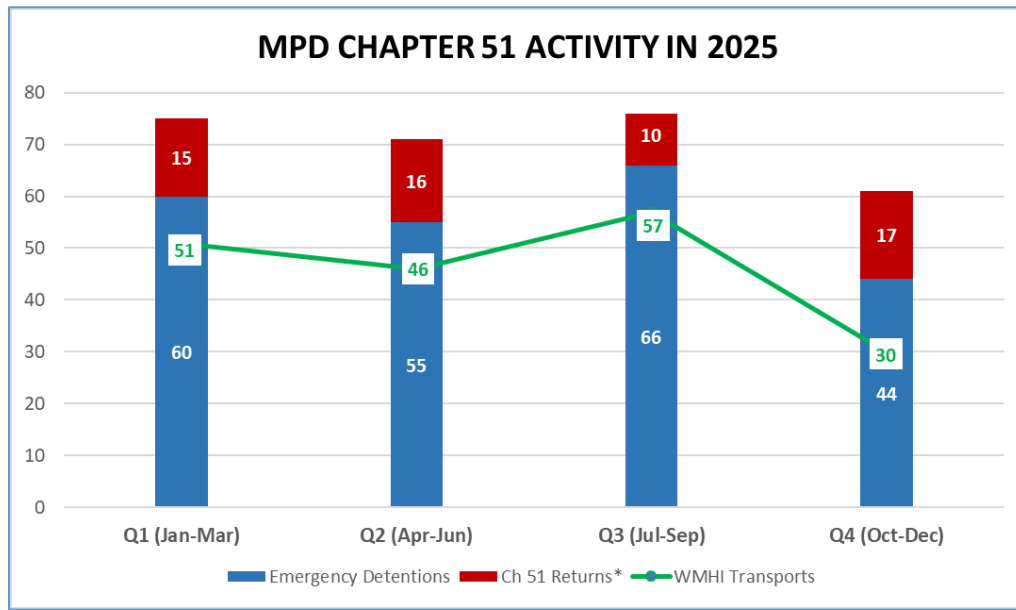
When an officer completes an ED, this initiates a court process with several possible outcomes. The individual may be discharged from involuntary hospitalization back to the community, but with certain conditions such as participating in outpatient treatment and services. If a detained individual does not comply with those conditions, Journey Mental Health can issue a "return", which authorizes law enforcement to take custody of the individual once again, and to deliver them back to a hospital. **In 2025, MPD took people into custody on 56 occasions for Chapter 51 returns.**

Finally, there are Chapter 51 commitments for which parties other than law enforcement can petition. Even though these commitments were initiated by other parties, the courts still vest the authority in law enforcement to take custody of the named individual until they are received by the appropriate medical facility. **In 2025, MPD was involved in 2 three-party petitions.**

When other detention facilities (i.e. local hospitals) lack capacity or determine that a detained individual is inappropriate for their facilities, Winnebago Mental Health Institute (WMHI) is the ultimate destination. To safely transport individuals from Madison to WMHI (Oshkosh, WI), at least two MPD officers will spend approximately four hours round-trip to make the conveyance. **Of MPD's total 283 Chapter 51-related conveyances, individuals were transported to WMHI 184 times, approximately 65% of all Chapter 51 conveyances.**

In 2025, MPD contracted with a third-party transport service, to make a total of 137 conveyances. All of these Chapter 51 conveyances were made to WMHI. **Of MPD's total 184 Chapter 51 conveyances made to WMHI in 2025, third-party transports constituted approximately 75% of these.** The city and MPD sees benefits to third-party transport services handling Chapter 51 conveyances, to include: improved comfort and decreased stigma for patients, and increased officer availability within the City of Madison.

The graph below illustrates MPD's Chapter 51 related activity, by quarter. Note that the Chapter 51 Returns* per quarter also incorporates the "other" Chapter-51-related commitment petitions into the figures.



Finally, when an individual's dangerous behavior provides sufficient grounds for an emergency detention, there is a possibility that this same behavior can be criminal. **Most Chapter 51 conveyance cases (199 of 283 cases, or 70.3%) did not result in officers drafting probable cause to arrest the individual for their behavior, nor in issuance of any municipal citations.**

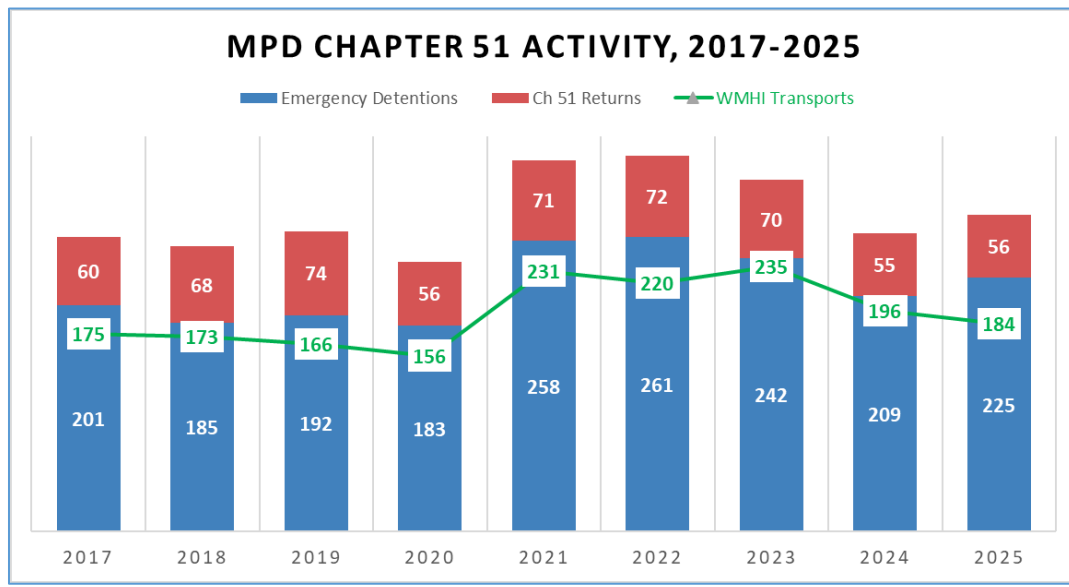
For the remaining 84 cases:

- **62 cases (21.9% of total Chapter 51 conveyances) resulted in officers effecting the emergency detention first**, then requesting an expedited review process from the District Attorney's office for the referred criminal charge(s).
- Although MPD does not track all charging decisions made by the DA's Office, data shows that **MPD transported 17 patients to jail (6.0% of total Chapter 51 conveyances), after discharge from treatment facilities;**
- **19 cases (6.7% of total Chapter 51 conveyances) resulted in officers booking the individual into jail first**, then effecting an emergency detention from jail custody; and
- **3 cases (1.1% of total Chapter 51 conveyances) resulted in officers effecting the emergency detention and issuing a municipal citation.**

These statistics support MPD MHU's commitment to the core value of diversion, and our belief that an individual's mental health needs should be prioritized.

MPD'S CHAPTER 51 ACTIVITY, YEAR-BY-YEAR

MPD's Chapter 51 conveyances have grown considerably over the last nine years, peaking in 2022. **In 2025, MPD saw a 7.2 percent increase in overall Chapter 51 conveyances from 2024, but the percentage of conveyances to Winnebago Mental Health Institute (WMHI) dropped by 6.1 percent.** The graph on the top of the next page illustrates those trends.



Data shows that MPD officers spend a significant amount of time investigating crisis incidents and carrying out tasks related to Chapter 51-related cases. In general, all Chapter 51 cases MPD are assigned to involve at least two officers for the entirety of our involvement. Note that call-for-service data does not always accurately reflect the number of total conveyances per year.

- **In 2022: of 337 Chapter 51 calls resulting in conveyances, this consumed 8,016.5 hours of MPD officer time.** This averaged out to **23.8 hours per case.**
- **In 2023: of 306 Chapter 51 calls resulting in conveyances, this consumed 6,573.3 hours of MPD officer time.** This averaged out to **21.5 hours per case.**
- **In 2024: of 262 Chapter 51 calls resulting in conveyances, this consumed 5,265.9 hours of MPD officer time.** This averaged out to **20.1 hours per case.**
- **In 2025: of 307 Chapter 51 calls resulting in conveyances, this consumed 6,144.1 hours of MPD officer time.** This averaged out to **20.0 hours per case.**

One factor that likely contributes to the decrease in the average MPD officer time per case is the third-party transport program.

MPD CRISIS RESPONSE COMMENDATIONS

In 2025 alone, **MPD personnel received 19 documented commendations for crisis response, de-escalation and MHU-related activities.** Commendations are submitted by members of the public and by colleagues who witness officer actions that are worthy of a performance recognition citation.

Below is a small sample of some commendations that MPD officers received last year:

- *“Officers responded to the men's shelter for a report of a fight. Officers used clear and effective verbal's to de-escalate the situation. Officers used minimal force to gain compliance as one of the subjects involved was armed with a weapon. Officers exercised an extraordinary amount of restraint and professionalism throughout this call.”*
- *“Officers responded to a missing juvenile with autism call. Resources were identified and deployed. Areas were checked. The subject was located. Officers facilitated the safe return of the juvenile. This call involved multitasking at the beginning of the officers' shift. The officers' attention to detail and commitment to our community is to be commended.”*

- *“Recognition for the officers who responded to a situation with a verbally aggressive minor that the family wanted removed from the home. Officers made contact with community resources to determine best possible resolutions based on cooperation that did not involve the detention center. This was of great help and gave options to the minor. Officers used their exceptional community skills to deescalate the minor. All officers showed great patience, restraint, and professionalism.”*
- *“Officers responded to a report of an armed suicidal subject. Officers established a perimeter and got eyes on the subject in their vehicle. A contact team was formed. The subject was contacted and they were cooperative with officers. The officers on this call are to be recognized for their exceptional response and actions that led to the subject getting necessary mental health help.”*
- *“Officers responded to a report of a female subject in crisis. The officers made contact with the subject who was very emotional and was in an elevated state. The officers remained calm throughout their contact. They walked with the subject as they helped calm her down. This was a great example of policing the Madison way, with compassion, and understanding of mental health related calls.”*
- *“Two officers rode horses at a community event. Before going to the event they observed a community member having a bad day and in need for some mental health help. The community member enjoyed the horses and even attended the event. She left a note on the Mounted Patrol truck that said “you might have saved my life. Thank you.” and signed it. This may be a small act of kindness by the officers but it meant a lot to the community member.”*
- *“An email was sent to thank the officers who responded to their call for assistance with their son who was having a mental health crisis. The subject was taken to the hospital. The email stated their son got better and they think that the police officers were a big reason due to how they treated their son. Their son told them the officers were kind and understanding. They wanted to thank the officers from the bottom of their hearts for their positive role in their son’s recovery.”*

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

In 2026, MPD’s Mental Health Unit looks forward to continuing what has made us successful, and to expanding upon our current efforts. Our major goals include:

- To onboard new members of the MHU, which include 1 Sergeant and 3 Officers who are joining the unit from patrol services.
- To increase the number of specialized trainings available to our MHOs and continue to find opportunities to attend trainings with our LECWs.
- To increase the exposure of our unit locally and around the state, namely through increased community-based presentations. Our unit is well positioned to help educate the community and raise awareness around mental illness, police responses to crises, and the services/resources available to community members and their families.
- To take a meaningful part in addressing system-wide issues through county-wide and interdisciplinary workgroups.