

After seven weeks of persistent advocacy, concerned public comments flooding city council meetings, and unaddressed community crises, the Eugene City Council maintains \$0 for CAHOOTS or a comparable crisis response service in their 2025-2027 Proposed Biennial Budget. Current and recently laid off CAHOOTS workers are swiftly developing a proposal for a "CAHOOTS 2.0" in time for the City Council to consider restoring funds for this vital service before their June 23rd vote on the proposed budget.

On Monday May 12th, the CAHOOTS/HOOTS Workers instagram page was suddenly removed due to "copyright infringement" without further explanation. Prior to the mass lay-offs, this had been a critical platform for workers to share union victories and calls for support, and after, it had been used by workers to advocate for reinstating CAHOOTS in the city budget. This page removal raises suspicions that White Bird Clinic is gearing up to protect the "CAHOOTS" name and image they squandered, and keep it from the people who are showing the most investment in this community's survival and future.

Despite losing access to their primary online platform, CAHOOTS 2.0 has been very active, meeting with various city leaders, compiling data and testimony on their own essentiality, and organizing public support. In the most recent Budget Committee Hearing on Wednesday May 14th, City Council fielded almost 30 public comments pleading with them to maintain funding for CAHOOTS and other critical community programs facing cuts, including Greenhill Animal Services, the Eugene Public Library, and the Amazon and Sheldon community pools.

During this hearing, one of the leaders of the CAHOOTS 2.0 project, Laurel Lisovskis, alerted the budget committee that since CAHOOTS closed on April 7th, there have been 1,710 documented missed opportunities for CAHOOTS to respond to community members in need. In each instance, these calls have instead received a response by Eugene Police (EPD), or no one

at all. Numerous community members used their public comment to point out the relatively straightforward solution to the current budget dilemma – the City Council should fund CAHOOTS with money currently allocated to the exorbitant and ever-growing EPD budget.

In the proposed 2025-2027 budget, EPD will be receiving over \$93 million per year, which is a significant increase from the \$87 million it received in 2024. EPD has been steadily increasing its budget each year since its \$56 million budget in 2018 (the oldest available data on the City of Eugene Open Budget site). Horrifically, if this proposed budget is approved, the EPD budget will make up a whopping 37% of the city's general fund (as stated by City Manager Sarah Medary at 2:49:40 of the recorded budget committee meeting). With these numbers, it's baffling that no city councilor or budget committee member publicly entertained the idea of shrinking EPD's allotment. On the contrary, EPD Chief Skinner was invited to the budget meeting to present on a variety of new alternate response programs EPD has implemented in the last two years, including "housing support officers" that "aid cleanup" (aka sweep encampments off the streets) and protect private property, and "downtown co-responders" who respond to low acuity mental and behavioral health calls downtown. Our unhoused neighbors and those who regularly distribute resources to them are experiencing frequent harassment from these "housing support officers" in the form of excessive citations, stolen and destroyed belongings and livelihoods, and a cycle of disruptive arrests and releases that, despite what is being claimed, doesn't seem to connect people with meaningful resources. One powerful public comment at the budget hearing from Reid Kajikawa, Director of Training at Public Defender Services of Lane County, explained that the number of trespass cases of people sleeping on the streets has tripled between last year and this year. Reid cautions the City Council, "you cannot incarcerate your way out of a public health crisis."

Furthermore, this obsession with ensuring “public safety” through more fines and jail time, more armed personnel trained in lethal combat, and more militarized police equipment, is an age-old trend that never ceases to be devastating and destructive. We have learned over and over again that police as first responders in mental health crises only escalate danger and cause preventable, irreversible police violence. Almost 25% of people murdered by police are actively having a mental health crisis. Just last month in Pocatello, Idaho, a nonspeaking Latino autistic 17-year-old with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability was killed by police who supposedly responded to support him through a mental health crisis. In a public statement responding to Victor’s murder, the Autistic People of Color Fund remind us, “repeat incidents of police violence being used against disabled people of color suggest that no amount of sensitivity trainings, body cameras, or other Band-aid measures will counteract the systemic effects of ableism and racism that lead officers to gun down our kindred with impunity.”

We cannot allow City Council to normalize the replacement of creative, community-based, effective crisis response with more armed officers roaming the streets and criminalizing and harming people for being unhoused or mentally ill. Although the CAHOOTS we’re most familiar with operates as a co-response model that does occasionally involve police officers in mental health crises, the buffer CAHOOTS provided between people in crisis and direct contact with police could be nothing short of life-saving. The fight to restore CAHOOTS is far from over, and it will require an outpouring of dedicated community support to dig City Council out of the public safety myths they are buried in.

Seeking more specific ways to get involved? Join CAHOOTS 2.0 and supporters, “Friends of CAHOOTS”, on an organizing zoom call on May 22nd at 4:30pm, sign up for their mailing list, and attend the Budget Committee hearings on May 21 and 28 to

make a public comment!

Update: Since this article was written, City Manager Sarah Medary announced a proposed addition of half a million dollars to the Fire and EMS budget as a "placeholder" that could be used to restore a contract with an Alternative Response vendor(she calls this addition "the CAH00TS dollars" but explained another governing entity would make the official decision of the vendor). Eugene Budget Committee Meeting: May 21 at 2:21:20