

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Jamelia Morgan, Director of the Center for Racial and Disability Justice at Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law.

JAMELIA MORGAN:

Let's think about the way that we provide quote unquote, "mental health crisis care services." In many jurisdictions, and including in the City of Chicago, police remain a part of helping individuals get access to emergency crisis care services. And in many ways, that's a clear pathway into police violence. We should be investing in robust behavioral health systems that do not rely on law enforcement to distribute access to emergency care services. And moreover, we could think about providing access to on-demand community based at home mental health services, so that we don't move to the crisis care need in emergency situations. And so when I think about the policing problems, that's one component of it.

The other part of it is that we confer police with a lot of discretion to decide who is disorderly, to decide who is abnormal, strange, weird. I'm thinking of Elijah McClain, a black youth that is minding his own business in Aurora, Colorado, observed by a quote unquote, "Concerned neighbor," that he looks strange and he is weird. That becomes a pathway into police violence. He's singing along to music. He's reported to be wearing a ski mask, because he has anemia and he's accommodating himself, yes, in the hot summer month of August, but he has the right to do so. And the police stop him, they perform a stop that we would say violates the Fourth Amendment, that amendment that regulates police, because they lack reasonable suspicion when they stop him, not suspicious of he's not engaging in anything that would amount to criminal suspicion, we would say. And that's a finding from the report that comes out of the killing.

So that we can also see as creating vulnerabilities, the amount of discretion we give to police to stop individuals that have disabilities, that might not fit the quote unquote, "Norm."

We need to not see the law as the only tool to protect and save the lives of disabled people. We have to look beyond that. We need a new world. And so I think that in many ways, because you as funders are so influential, allowing the community to help set your agendas would do a lot to advance movements towards radical transformative change. Because these systems are harming disabled people, particularly disabled people of color. And we've seen no real reaction to that.

And I guess the last little point for the researchers, let's start funding new approaches to research. Not the same organizations that are white led, that are not disabled led, disability led, that continue to fund research and support projects by police, by prisons. Let's start looking at peer support models. Let's start letting people with psychiatric disabilities like the National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery lead the conversation and set the research agendas and fund those projects.

NARRATOR:

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