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PUBLIC SAFETY - Capital Metro creates community oriented police force

By Lakisha Lemons | Austin

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AUSTIN, Texas — Capital Metro Transit Authority plans to roll out a new policing model for an in-house police department.

The community oriented plan will include non-armed public safety ambassadors, community intervention specialists and trained transit police officers.

Gardner Tabon, executive VP and chief safety officer for CapMetro, says it's an honor and a privilege to take on the challenge of reimagining public safety in the city

We will be taking a totally different approach to public safety. We want to not just gain the communities trust but we want to maintain it as well. Our public safety ambassadors will have multiple responsibilities including a touch of security as well as the ability to make a decision at the scene of a possible incident and be able to de-escalate before it even becomes something a police officer may have to report to," Tabon said

In part, community intervention specialists will work as liaisons between the public and the department.

Putting boots on the ground in the community to help provide needed resources to individuals facing everyday challenges, such as homelessness and mental health issues.

Tabon says these keys roles will help mediate a situation before it actually becomes a serious issue. The department plans to prevent calling law enforcement for incidents that may not be police or law enforcement issues.

"I am particularly, as an African American male, very sensitive as to what has been going on over the past two years. I want to really make sure that we have in place a police department that the community will appreciate," Tabon said.

CapMetro's pilot program for policing is the first initiative of its kind in the state of Texas. While the police force is transit-specific, trained police officers will have access to the best training available, as well as initial and refresher training to better serve the community
