



Allegheny County Council

County of Allegheny
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Legislation Text

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Motion of the Council of Allegheny County signing on to the Call to Action to reduce the number of people with mental illness in our county jail, through efforts including, but not limited to, sharing lessons learned with other counties in Pennsylvania, and encouraging all county officials, employees, and residents to participate in the Stepping Up initiative.

WHEREAS, counties routinely provide treatment services to the estimated 2 million people with serious mental illness who are booked into jails each year;

WHEREAS, prevalence rates of serious mental illness in jails are three to six times higher than for the general public; and of those individuals, three-quarters have a co-occurring substance use disorder;

WHEREAS, adults with mental illness tend to stay longer in jail and, upon release, are at a higher risk of recidivism than people without mental or substance use disorders;

WHEREAS, county jails spend two to three times more on adults with mental illness (who require interventions), compared with those people without these treatment needs;

WHEREAS, absent appropriate treatment and services, people with mental illness continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families;

WHEREAS, Allegheny County takes pride in its responsibility to protect and enhance the health, welfare, and safety of its residents;

WHEREAS, Allegheny County has developed programs across the criminal justice system with the courts and municipalities, which are helping hundreds of people with mental and substance use disorders stay out of jail, including:

- Crisis Intervention Team training for police and other law enforcement; and a Central Recovery Center where officers can take people with mental illness for medical evaluation and respite, as an alternative to arrest; and
- Evidence-based “specialty courts,” including Drug Court, Mental Health Court, and Veterans Court, which provide opportunities for diversion from jail to treatment, accountability to judges, and service coordination; and
- Service coordination for individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders as they leave the jail, so they can better connect with behavioral health services, housing, and support.

WHEREAS, through the Stepping Up initiative, the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation are encouraging public, private, and nonprofit partners to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS MOVED, that Allegheny County Council does hereby sign on to the Call to

Action to reduce the number of people with mental illness in our county jail, through efforts including, but not limited to, sharing lessons learned with other counties in Pennsylvania, and encouraging all county officials, employees, and residents to participate in the Stepping Up initiative.

IT IS FURTHER MOVED to use the comprehensive resources available through Stepping Up to support the county and courts in developing a plan of action for reducing the number of people who are unnecessarily incarcerated in Allegheny County. This plan will involve:

- Convening a diverse team of leaders and decision makers from multiple agencies that are committed to safely reducing the number of people with mental illness in jails;
- Examining the capacity for treatment and services in Allegheny County to determine which programs and services are available in the county for people with mental and substance use disorders, and to identify state and local policy and funding barriers to minimizing their contact with the justice system while providing treatment and supports in the community;
- Collecting and reviewing prevalence numbers and assessing individuals' needs to better identify adults with mental illness entering the jail and their recidivism risk, and using that baseline information to guide decision making at the system, program, and individual levels;
- Ensuring the plan has measurable outcomes for the system and for individuals;
- Implementing research-based approaches that advance the plan;
- Creating a process for using data and information systems to track progress and publicly report results;
- Ensuring that the plan builds upon the recommendations of the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics' Task Force on Criminal Justice.