



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Pennsylvania Courts Develop Statewide Focus on Behavioral Health

HARRISBURG — In an effort to fulfill the Supreme Court’s long-standing commitment to making justice accessible for all Pennsylvanians, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts created an office focused on behavioral health, aimed at improving court responses to behavioral health challenges within the judicial system.

“Pennsylvanians with mental illness need access to early intervention, crisis stabilization, behavioral health treatments and other supports to reach fair and appropriate outcomes,” said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Debra Todd.

“It is often said that instituting lasting change takes a village and this effort is no different. We look forward to developing shared goals with our government partners and expanding solutions in the courts to better respond to court users with behavioral health needs.”

The AOPC Office of Behavioral Health will work to identify gaps in the system, to address key issues including access to services and support, and pinpoint intersections between at-risk populations and the courts in a wide range of matters, including truancy, domestic relations, juvenile delinquency and dependency, criminal justice and civil commitments.

The office is developing training opportunities for judges and creating a local roadmap to resources and services statewide.

“Across the nation, courts have seen the behavioral health crisis grow in severity, frequency and intensity and the Pennsylvania judicial system is not immune,” said Justice Kevin Dougherty.

“Pennsylvanians are struggling and finding there are more barriers to the road to help and self-sufficiency than there are outlets for support. We must change that, and I am pleased to champion the need for systemic change in Pennsylvania's court system.

“If we can provide support to people who become involved in the court system and have a plan in place to assist, we can change and save lives. We just need to be willing to do the work and the courts stand ready.”

In response to the growing crisis, a statewide mental health summit will be held later this year in partnership with the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, as well as other government and community leaders and organizations. This collaborative “call to action”

summit will aim to be the starting point to develop a statewide action plan to improve court responses to behavioral health challenges.

“This isn’t a problem isolated to one community, one region or one population – this is a problem we all shoulder,” said State Court Administrator Andrea Tuominen. “It is incumbent upon us to be part of the solution and find ways to open the door to opportunities for Pennsylvanians and their families who are struggling with behavioral health issues and find themselves in the court system.”

In addition, the summit will provide educational sessions for attendees with opportunities for county-based teams to plan improved system responses to individuals with mental illness on priority issues including crisis stabilization, pre-trial diversion and re-entry, juvenile justice and trauma.

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