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Sheriff Koutoujian, Senator L'Italien announce funding to establish a restoration center in Middlesex County

State Senator Barbara L'Italien (D- 2nd Essex & Middlesex District) and Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian today announced the Legislature has appropriated \$250,000 in the FY2018 budget for the first year of a pilot program to establish a restoration center in Middlesex County.

Senator Ken Donnelly originally sponsored the budget request prior to his passing in April of this year.

The restoration center would provide greater opportunity for law enforcement and the courts to divert those with mental illness and/or substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system prior to arrest or adjudication. The center would help support ongoing law enforcement diversionary efforts in nearly two-dozen Middlesex communities while also expanding the community capacity for treatment.

"I filed this budget amendment, historically supported by my late colleague Senator Ken Donnelly, because mental health and addiction should be treated as a public health issue," said Sen. L'Italien. "Instead of criminalizing the disease of addiction, we must treat the victims of the opioid crisis – which is hitting Middlesex County particularly hard – with rehabilitation and support."

"Last year, 42% of those entering our custody required medical detox and 46% reported a history of mental illness," said Sheriff Koutoujian. "Our jails and houses of correction have become de facto mental health and addiction treatment facilities. The money for this initiative will help us determine how we can effectively break the cycle of incarceration by diverting more individuals away from incarceration and into treatment."

"Senator Donnelly worked hard to address the needs of those suffering with serious and persistent mental illness and he would be thrilled that the creation of a restoration center has been included in the final budget," said Cindy Friedman, Senator Donnelly's former chief of staff. "This is a giant step in the decriminalization of mental illness and substance use disorder in our state and I am so grateful for the commitment shown by our legislature to address this important issue."

Nationally, the Roberto L. Jimenez, M.D. Restoration Center in San Antonio, Texas has become the leading model for similar efforts. Founded in 2008 to help keep people in crisis out of jails and emergency rooms, the center today offers a variety of services from crisis intervention to residential detoxification and programs for those suffering from co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, among others.

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