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Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission Joins Behavioral Health-Focused Expansion of Local Criminal Justice Reform Efforts

Middlesex County joins ten other communities in a collaborative effort to maximize learning about how to accelerate behavioral health reform and diversion across the criminal justice system

The Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission today announced its selection to the IMPACT Network, a behavioral health-focused expansion of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#) (SJC) supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The SJC IMPACT Network will utilize a peer-to-peer model to maximize what jurisdictions like the Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission have learned about how to accelerate behavioral health reform and diversion across the criminal justice system.

The Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission, established as part of the 2018 Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform, is co-chaired by Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and Danna Mauch, PhD, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health. The commission is comprised of members representing behavioral health providers, advocates, state healthcare agencies, and criminal justice entities. The commission has spent three years assessing the gaps in behavioral health services to help inform the development of a model that would allow individuals with behavioral health conditions to be diverted away from arrest and unnecessary hospitalization and toward crisis care. The commission is working to launch a pilot restoration center program with the support and technical assistance of the SJC IMPACT Network.

The SJC is a \$258 million national initiative funded by the MacArthur Foundation to support collaboration among local leaders and communities to reduce over-incarceration and eliminate racial disparities in local criminal justice systems by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. More than five years after its launch, the [Safety and Justice Challenge Network](#) has grown to 57 sites across 32 states modeling reform. Participating cities and counties are using data to identify key drivers of incarceration and racial inequities and working with diverse groups of community members, individuals who work in the justice system, and people with lived experience to develop impactful reforms.

The SJC Impact Network will integrate six cities and counties new to the SJC: Eau Claire County (WI), West Texas Centers/Howard County (TX), San Juan County (NM), Middlesex County (MA), Orange County (CA), and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. The six new cities and counties will join five communities already working to reduce over-incarceration of individuals with behavioral health needs in local criminal justice systems- Allegheny County (PA), East Baton Rouge (LA), Charleston County (SC), Milwaukee County (WI), and Pennington County (SD).

“Our selection for the Safety and Justice Challenge Network further highlights the incredible work commission members have done over these past three years,” said Sheriff Koutoujian and Dr. Mauch. “We are honored and humbled to be included amongst this outstanding list of jurisdictions that are committed to reducing the number of incarcerated individuals with behavioral health needs. By establishing and enhancing community-based resources, we can improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities. We look forward to sharing our experiences and learning from the incredible experiences of our colleagues across the nation.”

The Safety and Justice Challenge brings together many of the nation’s leading criminal justice organizations to provide technical assistance and counsel to the jurisdictions. [Policy Research, Inc.](#) (PRI) will oversee technical assistance to the behavioral health-focused IMPACT Network sites, in collaboration with multiple SJC partners.

“We know that men and women involved in the criminal justice system, and in local jails in particular, have rates of mental illness and other behavioral health needs that are several times that of the general population. PRI is excited to work with IMPACT Network sites to continue the SJC’s vital work around community-based responses to the involvement of people with mental and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system,” said Ashley Krider, Senior Project Associate at PRI.

“Jails were never intended to serve as warehouses for people with behavioral health needs, yet too many people end up there because of a lack of community services and access to care and treatment,” said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur Foundation’s Director of Criminal Justice. “Over the past five years, the Safety and Justice Challenge has safely reduced the ineffective and harmful use of jails, and we are committed to supporting cities and counties as they reimagine how people with behavioral health challenges can remain in the community.”

More information about the work underway can be found at www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org.

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