



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Middlesex Sheriff's Office Peter J. Koutoujian Sheriff

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## **Restoration Center Commission leaders advocate for funds to support jail-diversion programs**

On October 22, State Senator Cindy F Friedman (D-Arlington), Middlesex Sheriff Peter J Koutoujian, and Dr. Danna Mauch testified before the Joint Committee on Revenue in favor of legislation that would create a permanent fund to help divert individuals with a mental illness or substance use disorder away from the criminal justice system and into appropriate treatment.

The bill, S.1662, would create a Criminal Justice and Community Support Trust Fund, which could be used to fund restoration centers, community-based jail diversion programs, and community policing and behavioral health trainings.

"The state has made progress over the last few years to divert individuals with behavioral health conditions away from the criminal justice system and into treatment centers," said Sen. Friedman (D-Arlington), lead sponsor of the bill. "This trust fund would allow the Commonwealth to continue this effort by supporting effective jail diversion strategies that will bring us one step closer to ending the criminalization of people suffering from an illness. I'm grateful for Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch for their collaboration and support of this initiative, and I hope it crosses the finish line this session."

Co-chaired by Sheriff Koutoujian and Dr. Mauch, the Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission – is tasked with establishing a pilot program that would help support ongoing law enforcement diversionary efforts across Middlesex County, while also expanding the community capacity for behavioral health treatment. The proposed center would provide a place for law enforcement to bring individuals in the midst of a behavioral health crisis, where they can receive appropriate treatment as an alternative to being incarcerated. The commission was created by the Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2018.

"We know we cannot arrest and incarcerate our way out of the behavioral health challenges we face," said Sheriff Koutoujian. "The creation of a restoration center, coupled with the passage of Senator Friedman's crucial legislation, will provide law enforcement more opportunities to divert individuals in

crisis away from the criminal justice system and into community-based treatment, producing better outcomes for individuals, communities and families.”

“Law enforcement and the justice system are responding to gaps in the public health and behavioral healthcare systems,” said Dr. Mauch, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH). “They desire solutions and resources to divert and serve at-risk individuals in the appropriate care systems. This legislation is an important step towards achieving that goal.”

In concluding their testimony, the panel of advocates urged the committee to report the bill favorably. To track the progress of the bill, visit <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/S1662>.

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