

# Forensic Services for Seriously Mentally Ill County Inmates

**Prisons are not the place for many individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities. Society must provide the treatment, resources and tools to safely transition them back into society.**

Untreated and unaddressed mental health needs are often the catalyst to entry into the criminal justice system—and the reason individuals continue to cycle back through the system. Counties have been leading the call to address the need for alternatives to placing offenders with mental illness or developmental disabilities in our prisons, a system that fails to effectively or compassionately address human need.

As a result of these efforts, counties and the state Department of Human Services have formed a strong partnership to address the shortages of psychiatric, or forensic, beds and have established a mechanism for counties to obtain state funding for community-based expansion of services. This means state hospital admissions can be reduced while county jail inmates get the services they need.

But much is still to be done. Not every county is currently served with expanded community capacity, and momentum must be maintained to help counties obtain support and resources to address their needs for forensic services. There is also a critical need to work closely with state policy makers to address the mental health system as a whole, not just for those who are involved with the criminal justice system, including funding for expanded services, beds and diversion.

State-county collaboration is critical to implementing effective best practices and joint training for prison administrators, county mental health staff, the judiciary, law enforcement, the medical community and others. Counties must also be involved in any decision that could impact county services, such the relocation of non-criminal individuals from forensic beds to community-based services.

By treating the reasons behind criminal behavior in an appropriate setting, Pennsylvania can break the cycle of admissions and readmissions to county jails while improving lives, using resources more effectively and building safer communities.



## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Expanding resources to allow more options for care and treatment of individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities outside of the prison system.
- Addressing the needs of the mental health system from a holistic perspective.
- Working collaboratively with the state to assure counties are involved in decision making around the mental health system.



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
Association of Pennsylvania

THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

For more information on **forensic bed access for seriously mentally ill county inmates**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org).