



MAINE CRIMINAL JUSTICE/MENTAL HEALTH BRIEFS

CONNECTICUT'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVERSION PROGRAM

Policy makers in Maine and around the country face the serious challenge of addressing the needs of people with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system. Other states have developed a number of strategies that offer alternatives to jail for mentally ill persons. The following is a description of another state's program aimed at reducing the number of persons with mental illness who are sentenced to serve time in the criminal justice system.

Connecticut's Criminal Justice Diversion Program

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program was created in response to the belief that the court system was not effectively dealing with incarcerated persons who have mental illness in the state. Prior to the development of the program, the courts were restricted to ordering competency evaluations, which could take up to 14 days, and which would be used only to order commitment to a mental health facility. The Department of Mental Health and Addictive Services (DMHAS) sought to improve the system.

How it works

The program is a pre-booking diversion strategy, consisting of a diversion team comprised of clinicians from mental health centers serving the court. The team spends 1-5 days a week at the court. Like many other diversion programs, participation is voluntary. The program is implemented as follows:

- Clinicians meet one-on-one with a client to assess his/her condition
- Based on the screening, a treatment plan that connects the client to the appropriate mental health services in the community is developed
- The clinician explains and recommends the treatment plan to the judge, who can either accept or reject the plan
- If the treatment plan is rejected, the client is not diverted to treatment,
- If the treatment plan is accepted, the participant is granted a conditional release, typically on a written promise to appear in 2-3 weeks.
- If the participant fails to continue treatment, the case is returned to the regular docket

While similarities between drug courts and the Criminal Justice Diversion Program exist, the program is not a drug court; it does not have its own docket and the court does not employ the mental health employees. Benefits of implementing a Criminal Justice Diversion Program include:

- Reduction in days served in jail
- Continuity of care after release

No cost to courts for implementation

Because of the initial success of the program, it is being expanded throughout the entire state of Connecticut.

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Diversion Re-Entry Steering Committee

The Committee is established to oversee the implementation of a joint action plan of action to address the needs of people with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system. The Diversion/Re-Entry (DRE) Steering Committee will focus on diverting people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and improving re-entry planning from prison or jail.

Maine Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (MACDL)
Maine Chiefs of Police
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Maine Criminal Justice Academy
Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC)
Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Maine Judicial Branch
Maine Mental Health Association
Maine Pre-Trial Services
Maine Prosecutors Association
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