



# COUNTY OF ERIE

**MARK C. POLONCARZ**

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

September 8, 2015

Erie County Legislature  
92 Franklin Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Buffalo, New York 14202

**RE: Stepping Up Initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails**

Dear Honorable Members:

Please find enclosed a resolution seeking legislative authorization and support for the national effort called the Stepping Up Initiative that has a specific and primary focus on reducing the number of mentally ill individuals in our local criminal justice system.

Should your Honorable Body require further information, I encourage you to contact Commissioner Michael Ranney, at the Department of Mental Health. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark C. Poloncarz", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.  
Erie County Executive

MCP/  
Enclosure

cc: Michael Ranney, Commissioner of Mental Health

# MEMORANDUM

**To:** Honorable Members of the Erie County Legislature  
**From:** Department of Mental Health  
**Re:** Stepping Up Initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails  
**Date:** September 8, 2015

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## **SUMMARY**

Earlier this year, Sen. Franken and Rep. Doug Collins introduced a bipartisan measure to combat the mental health crisis in the criminal justice system. This process is known nationally as the Stepping up Initiative and has garnered support from 57 counties and is gaining momentum on a daily basis. The Stepping Up Initiative represents Federal and State legislators, mental health advocates, and public officials coming together across the country to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails. This is a joint collaboration between the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Associations of Counties (NACo) and the American Psychiatric Foundation. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) will provide expert guidance to assist counties in developing methods of collecting data to determine the extent of the problem within local holding centers. The BJA will also assist counties in developing a plan that draws on sound research with a team of diverse stakeholders and designing an approach to track progress.

## **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

None.

## **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The Erie County plan: Initiatives for a Stronger Community (Section 4.11) has recognized the importance of a coordinated delivery of care for the mentally ill individuals in contact with the criminal justice system. Having legislative support for this effort will provide the necessary platform in Erie County to propel improvements in our local criminal justice system and allow for obtaining additional support from national experts.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION**

Not authorizing this process could delay local efforts to improve our local criminal justice system by not benefiting from additional technical support from federal and state officials and counties with similar issues across our country.

## **STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL**

Upon approval of this resolution, the County Executive will authorize a representative from the Department of Mental Health to inform the members responsible for coordinating the Stepping Up Initiative of our intentions to further enhancements in our local criminal justice system and to reduce the number of mentally ill individuals in our local holding center (see actual resolution for specific action items).

A RESOLUTION SUBMITTED BY:  
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

RE: Stepping Up Initiative to reduce the number  
of people with mental illness in jails

WHEREAS, counties across the county/state routinely provide treatment services to the estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses booked into jail each year; and

WHEREAS, prevalence rates of serious mental illnesses in jails are three to six times higher than for the general public; and

WHEREAS, almost three-quarters of adults with serious mental illnesses in jails have co-occurring substance use disorders; and

WHEREAS, adults with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail and upon release are at a higher risk of recidivism than people without these disorders; and

WHEREAS, the average cost per inmate in the Erie County jail system is \$165.00 per day and county jails spend two to three times more on adults with mental illnesses that require interventions compared to those without these treatment needs; and

WHEREAS, without the appropriate treatment and services, people with mental illnesses continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families; and

WHEREAS, the County of Erie, New York and all counties take pride in their responsibility to protect and enhance the health, welfare and safety of their residents in efficient and cost-effective ways; and

WHEREAS, the County of Erie, New York has prioritized improvement in the coordination and delivery of care for mentally ill individuals in contact with the criminal justice system in section 4.11 within the county plan: Initiatives for a Stronger Community; and

WHEREAS, the Erie County Department of Mental Health and the Erie County Department of Probation have partnered and are collaborating to identify gaps in the criminal justice service systems and streamline procedures to reduce unnecessary and costly incarcerations; and

WHEREAS, through the longstanding efforts of the Police Mental Health Collaboration Project of Erie County, vast improvements have been made to first responders efforts in dealing with the mentally ill in crisis situations and has led to a decrease in the number of arrests and decrease number of injuries using an evidenced based Crisis Intervention Team Training Model; and

WHEREAS, through the Stepping Up Initiative, the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation are

encouraging public, private and nonprofit partners to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails; and

WHEREAS, in order to begin reducing the number of mentally ill people in jail, the County's agencies should:

- a) Convene and draw on a diverse team of leaders and decision makers from multiple agencies committed to safely reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in jails
- b) Collect and review prevalence numbers and assess individuals' needs to better identify adults entering jails with mental illnesses and their recidivism risk, and use that baseline information to guide decision making at the system, program and case levels
- c) Examine treatment and service capacity to determine which programs and services are available in the county for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders and identify state and local policy and funding barriers to minimizing contact with the justice system and providing treatment and supports in the community
- d) Develop a plan with measurable outcomes that draws on the jail assessment and prevalence data and the examination of available treatment and service capacity, while considering identified barriers
- e) Implement research-based approaches that advance the plan
- f) Create a process to track progress using data and information systems and to report on successes
- g) Create a process to track progress using data and information systems and to report on successes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the County Executive is authorized to select a representative from the Department of Mental Health to participate in the Stepping Up Initiative and sign on to the Call to Action to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in our county jail, commit to sharing lessons learned with other counties in New York State and across the country to support this national initiative and encourage all county officials, employees and residents to participate in the "Stepping Up" initiative; and be it further

RESOLVED, that certified copies of this resolution be sent to the County Executive's Office, the Division of Budget and Management, the County Attorney, the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Probation.