



DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Douglas County Commissioners Sign “Stepping Up” Resolution

(Douglas County, Ore.) – The Douglas County Commissioners signed a resolution supporting a call to action to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in our county jail. “Stepping Up to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in the Jails,” is a national initiative. To date, 17 counties in Oregon and 400 counties nationwide have passed “Stepping Up” resolutions. The initiative is a partnership between the Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Association of Counties, and the American Psychiatric Association.

Douglas County Commissioner Chris Boice, who is the liaison to the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC), said, “Because of community and government partnerships programs like this are successful. We take pride in our community and our responsibility to protect and enhance the health, welfare and safety of our residents in efficient and cost-effective ways.”

In Douglas County, the goals under “Stepping Up” include: Tracking how many people with mental illness are passing through the Douglas County jail; implementing mental health screening and assessments; expanding Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for law enforcement officers and others; assisting with efforts to open a crisis respite center for those experiencing a mental health crisis; and improving mental health services and communication between the criminal justice system, mental health providers and the community.

Douglas County’s LPSCC Coordinator Melissa McRobbie-Toll said, “Often, people with severe mental illness cycle in and out of the jail, and the emergency room; they frequently come into contact with police, also. Passing a ‘Stepping Up’ resolution is a first step toward breaking this cycle and ensuring that those people are connected to the treatment and services they need.”

Since deinstitutionalization several decades ago, jails have turned into de facto housing for many chronically mentally ill people. Their jail stays tend to be longer than other inmates', and their risk of recidivism is higher. The “Stepping Up” initiative was created to address this problem.

Counties routinely provide treatment services to an estimated 2 million people with serious mental illness booked into jails nationwide each year, and rates of serious mental illness in jails are three to six times higher than for the general public. Almost three-quarters of adults with serious mental illnesses in jails have co-occurring substance use disorders, and adults with mental illness tend to stay longer in jail and, upon release, have a higher risk of recidivism than people without these disorders.

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About the [Stepping Up Initiative](#)

Led by the [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo), the [Council of State Governments \(CSG\) Justice Center](#), and the [American Psychiatric Association Foundation](#) (APAF), a national call to action kicked off in May 2015 to encourage counties and jails to work with state and local agencies and stakeholders on an actionable plan. With support from the [U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance](#) (BJA), the initiative offers tools, resources, webinars, access to experts, and other assistance that are linked to each element are made available to individuals and teams engaged in the initiative.

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