

Jackie Lacey

District Attorney
<http://da.lacounty.gov>



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Jane Robison, Assistant Chief
Media Relations Division
213-257-2000
JRobison@da.lacounty.gov
Twitter: @LADAOoffice

July 23, 2015

District Attorney Jackie Lacey Offers Comprehensive Plan to Safely Divert Mentally Ill Offenders from Jail

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today presented a comprehensive plan to the Board of Supervisors to safely divert mentally ill offenders from county jail.

District Attorney Lacey is scheduled to discuss the report at the Aug. 4 board meeting.

“I am proud of the unprecedented collaboration of stakeholders that has resulted in recommendations for the significant expansion of services to the mentally ill,” said District Attorney Lacey, founder and chair of the Los Angeles County Mental Health Advisory Board, which authored the report. “The implementation of these recommendations will benefit Los Angeles County over the next several years.”

The 41-page report inventories existing resources and sets priorities that include:

- Expanding training for law enforcement personnel;
- Increasing the number of co-deployed law enforcement teams; and
- Adding community-based beds to house and treat mentally ill individuals, particularly those with criminal records.

“This is our first comprehensive attempt to fundamentally change the way we treat mentally ill people in Los Angeles County when they come into contact with law enforcement personnel,” District Attorney Lacey said. “When implemented, these recommendations will provide treatment options to safely divert nonviolent, mentally ill offenders from jail, which is more costly, and at times, inhumane.”

The task force’s top priority is Critical Incident Training (CIT) for law enforcement personnel.

The training is designed to raise awareness of and sensitivity to mental health issues and provide law enforcement personnel with concrete tools to interact more effectively and compassionately with mentally ill persons in the field.

When fully implemented, the training is expected to reduce litigation and judgment costs in Los Angeles County and other participating cities. The Sheriff's Department estimates that up to 40 percent of all use of force incidents involve mentally ill persons, according to the report.

The task force recommends support for the sheriff's six-year plan to train 5,355 patrol deputies in a 40-hour CIT course. In addition, it endorses efforts of the District Attorney's Criminal Justice Institute to provide similar 16-hour training for the 48 smaller municipal police agencies throughout Los Angeles County.

The task force also recommends increasing the number of co-deployed law enforcement teams to defuse potentially violent situations involving mentally ill people throughout Los Angeles County. The specially trained teams are comprised of a mental healthcare clinician and a law enforcement officer.

The county Department of Mental Health now provides services for eight such Sheriff's Department teams. The task force recommends expanding the number of teams to 23 within the Sheriff's Department.

A big portion of the report identifies the many different types of treatment-based housing for mentally ill offenders – from immediately after an initial contact with law enforcement to permanent supportive housing following incarceration.

“For lower-level crimes, when mental health treatment can appropriately take place somewhere other than the jail while preserving the safety of the public, continued incarceration may not serve the interest of justice,” the report states.

Currently, it is more time efficient for law enforcement officers to book a mentally ill person into jail for a minor offense than to wait hours to have the same person treated in a hospital emergency room, the report says.

To address that issue, the task force recommends the addition of three more Urgent Care Centers, where a mentally ill person may be taken for immediate evaluation to determine what services they require.

The county's Department of Mental Health currently operates four Urgent Care Centers; a fifth one is slated to open in October.

The task force also recommends the establishment of Residential Medical Detoxification Services, or “Sobering Centers,” for mentally ill offenders who need treatment for acute alcohol and substance abuse issues.

Once in the criminal justice system, mentally ill defendants – especially those who are homeless – are more likely to serve time behind bars because they are not granted bail or released on their own recognizance, the report states.

In an effort to reduce recidivism among this population, the task force recommends more permanent supportive housing, especially for those with criminal records.

Mental health diversion is not a jail reduction plan, according to the report.

If the need for mental health jail beds is reduced, however, it will enable serious and violent felony offenders who are not mentally ill to serve a longer percentage of their sentences, the report states. Such a result would enhance public safety but would not reduce the need for jail beds.

#

About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Last year, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecuted more than 71,000 felony defendants and nearly 112,000 misdemeanor defendants.