

I would like to begin by echoing the comments of DA Sinnett and DA Zicarelli regarding the mental health crisis in Pennsylvania directly impacting criminal justice. In 2023, York County received 2,791 mental health related 911 calls.

For decades the criminal justice system became default mental health treatment system—exacerbated by the closures of state hospitals and reduced beds for complex mental health conditions.

Because tangible solutions were not provided by state, counties needed to forge their own solutions with limited financial and personnel resources, especially in availability of mental health professionals.

Like Adams and Westmoreland Counties, York County came together to provide answers on how to rehabilitate individuals with mental health needs that do not belong in the criminal justice system, particularly in jails.

Law enforcement are the initial and primary responders to individuals in crisis. They are the de facto front line mental health care providers when they respond to mental health calls and need every tool in the tool box to keep the community, individuals with mental health issues, and the law enforcement officer safe.

The first and most critical step is the development of Crisis Intervention Teams. York County has Crisis Intervention Teams throughout its police departments. In 2023, when a CIT trained officer is involved in a mental health crisis incident, over 97% of police contact does not result in arrest, or less than 3% are arrested. Additionally, use of force by a CIT officer did not occur in over 95% of contacts; no injuries resulted to the officer in over 99% of contacts; no injuries resulted to the mental health consumer in over 85% of contacts.

York County now serves as the CIT training partner for the Pennsylvania State Police in the Commonwealth in addition to local law enforcement. The State must support expansion and funding of CIT throughout PA.

Second, echoing DA Sinnett, York County also has a highly successful Co-Responder Initiative throughout York County to assist law enforcement. In 2023, Co-Responders had 1,704 contacts with individuals. Of those, less than 1% were arrested—an over 99% success rate. 20% of contacts were to assist with 302's and 13% were 201's—while the rest of the assessments involved linkages to services, providing support to consumer and family, and assistance with physical health needs. This success rate removes individuals from the criminal justice system who do not need to be there and assists law enforcement and emergency personnel by not requiring them to step outside of their scope of service.

While the Co-Responder Initiative does have public funding and management, it also works in partnership with local health care providers. In York specifically WellSpan Health. This is an example of the public/private partnerships needed to improve the quality of care where mental health intersects with criminal justice.

A key public/private partnership in York County is Community Action for Recovery and Development (CARD)—a public/private initiative meant to bridge the gaps between health systems and the criminal justice system. With the assistance of CARD, WellSpan developed the START center, which is a Certified Community Behavioral Health Center. The START center receives referrals concerning individuals who otherwise would be criminally justice involved or would be taken to the hospital emergency room. START also receives referrals for treatment from the courts and probation department.

START created 6,700 emergency room diversions or an almost 32% reduction in emergency room department use for behavioral health reasons. START also works with providing services to individuals incarcerated in York County Prison as part of expanded services to criminal justice involved individuals.

Under CARD, York County is currently working on implementing a Wellness and Diversion Center where the prior work release center at YCP was located. This center would have a primary focus on adults and youth in

need of crisis care and follow up mental health or substance use disorder services with resource and case management referrals. This will be a public/private partnership with health care providers and other service providers. The state should identify and promote models and financial resources to initiatives centered on use of public/private partnerships that include health care and service providers.

York County implemented the Stepping Up model to identify individuals arrested and committed to York County Prison that have serious mental illness. A team of criminal justice agencies, health care providers, service providers, and prison personnel review each Serious Mental Illness (SMI) case to see if the individual can be diverted from prison and safely integrated back into the community. Stepping Up has assisted with reducing vulnerable and appropriate individuals from incarceration.

Despite these successes, a major crisis remains with competency restoration for incarcerated individuals and the high SMI population that remains in the prison who lack home resources upon release. York County is actively working with OMHSAS to obtain funding for the development of a Competency Restoration and Behavioral Health Unit within York County Prison. As DA Zicarelli noted, the forensic beds at Torrence fill quickly and there is a lack of available state hospital beds to address this issue. Other states in this situation have developed state/county partnerships, where the state will fund the creation of such Competency Restoration and Behavioral Health Units with county prisons so long as they meet the appropriate guidelines to best serve the mental health population. Such partnerships between the state and counties should be encouraged and funded.

We also have well-established and highly successful Wellness Courts focused on high risk/high need individuals with mental health or substance abuse issues in both the juvenile and adult justice systems. Of particular note are the Mental Health Court and our Veterans Court. The state should continue to encourage the development and implementation of Wellness Courts throughout PA, especially for Vets who have a disproportionate representation within our criminal justice system and are predominately trauma driven.

As DA Sinnett stated, housing remains a barrier. In York we established a Stable Housing Collaborative in which my office participates to evaluate the complex housing needs throughout the county and how public and private agencies can come together to reach solutions. In the area of housing for individuals with mental health needs, the state needs to continue the investment and expansion in Long Term Structured Residences (LTSR's) in addition to promoting housing alternatives and initiatives for individuals with mental health needs.

Finally, York County has a robust Reentry Coalition that connects reentrants with a wide variety of services, including those for individuals with mental health needs. Our latest initiative is the opening of the Reentry Opportunity Center. This is a public facility located at our Criminal Justice Complex attached to our York County Prison. Service providers come to the ROC to connect both incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and families of reentrants to critical services, including those in the area of mental health services. The state must continue to support the expansion of reentry services in every county to reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

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