

Jail Overcrowding Task Force
Mental Health Subcommittee Work Group
Summary of Status/Progress

OVERVIEW

The Jail Overcrowding Task Force formed a Mental Health Subcommittee to discuss current issues and to prioritize short- and long-term strategies for addressing the needs of the mentally ill inmate population. A listing of the issues and potential solutions generated by the Subcommittee is in Attachment A.

PROGRESS/INITIATIVES IN-PROCESS

- ❖ The Criminal Courts are in the process of implementing a small rotation (“wheel”) of 8 to 10 defense attorneys who would specialize in handling cases involving mentally ill defendants.
- ❖ The Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) Community Justice Plan includes a proposal for a 16-bed residential treatment facility for offenders on probation who have diagnosed mental illnesses and mental health liaisons through a specialized mental health caseload.
 - The Community Justice Plan also includes a proposal for Mental Health Court Liaisons.
- ❖ A new position, Jail Case Coordinator, is being piloted. Working out of Criminal Courts Administration (CCA), the Coordinator will work to effect the earliest possible pretrial release from jail of incarcerated persons, including mentally ill offenders. This pilot is scheduled for implementation by February 2004.
- ❖ Austin/Travis County MHMR is seeking additional Mental Health Court Liaisons to work with the courts and jail. The proposal, being sought with Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI), would raise the number of liaisons to four.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS/PRIORITIES

The Subcommittee formed a Work Group to conduct further prioritization. In a meeting on December 15, 2004, the Work Group broke into two subgroups to discuss priority needs and possible solutions for mentally ill offenders in the areas of:

- Arrest and Booking,
- Pretrial/Courts, and
- Post-release/Post-disposition.

All of the needs identified by the Work Group are shown in Attachment B. A summary of current status and progress toward addressing the issues follows. The following issues/areas were identified by the Work Group as priority needs (i.e., city by both subgroups):

- ❖ The Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) needs to gain better access to information from MHMR so that TCSO can better meet the inmates' mental health needs.
- ❖ There is a need for a central Sobriety/Detoxification and/or Jail Diversion Center, at which mental health assessment can be conducted.
- ❖ There needs to be a reentry plan for released inmates directing them to community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment services.
- ❖ There need to be more resources to enable defense attorneys to provide adequate case management.
 - ◆ It was suggested that University of Texas Social Work interns might help serve this case management function.
- ❖ For purposes of early and appropriate assignment of attorneys, CCA and Pretrial Services need access to the mental health "flag" in TCSO's Corrections Management System (CMS).
- ❖ Client Information needs to be shared between TCSO and ATCMHMR for increased coordination of services.
 - ◆ It was suggested that a discussion be held with the ATCMHMR legal counsel about the interpretation in Travis County of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in regards to the sharing of confidential information. State statute creates an exception to HIPAA if access to the information sought would provide continuity of care (COC).

NEXT STEPS

- ❖ It is anticipated that the forthcoming report by the Mayor's Task Force on Mental Health will provide recommendations for mental health initiatives. At that time, Criminal Justice Planning will analyze overlapping priorities and provide a supplemental report to assist stakeholders in prioritizing initiatives.
- ❖ There is a need for further study and prioritization of several initiatives identified by the Mental Health Task Force. Proposed salutations need to be refined and expanded as appropriate.
- ❖ The JOTF Mental Health Subcommittee should collaborate with other mental health initiatives to pursue further action and implementation.
- ❖ Potential solutions should be prioritized through the involvement of decision makers and other pertinent stakeholders.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Jail Overcrowding Task Force Mental Health Subcommittee – Issues and Potential Solutions

Attachment B – All Priority Needs Identified by the Mental Health Subcommittee Work Group