

## **Proposed Platform Change to Justice and Public Safety Platform**

### **Under Criminal Justice System, Section D. Corrections, insert at the end:**

**17. Federal Support for Implementing and Maintaining Deflection Initiatives:** NACo urges Congress to increase financial support for measures that maximize the ability for counties to develop and support programs to deflect non-violent individuals into treatment during a behavioral health crisis. NACo encourages federal action to expedite the creation of collaborative deflection initiatives that offer non-violent individuals immediate pathways into treatment and other services as an alternative to traditional involvement in the criminal justice system.

**Background:** In collaboration with various community partners, law enforcement agencies across the country have implemented deflection programs for non-violent individuals in need of treatment for substance abuse and mental health disorders. County programs such as 'A Way Out' in Lake County, Illinois provides participants with access to treatment to end the destructive cycle of substance abuse, dependency, and addiction. "A Way Out" offers any person, regardless of ability to pay, access to services by walking into a police department and requesting inpatient or outpatient care. Programs such as the Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COaST), also in Lake County, dispatches mental health professionals and law enforcement in response to emergency calls for individuals who are experiencing a substance abuse or mental health crisis. These programs de-escalate situations and quickly connect those in need to behavioral health services. Based on the success of these programs, states such as Illinois (P.A. 100-1025) passed legislation to support deflection programs and provide potential funding for police departments to establish these programs.

Approximately 850 police departments in the U.S. have implemented deflection programs within the past decade. With an average of 60 percent of police calls generally classified as non-crime related, many law enforcement call responses do not lead to arrests. As a result, law enforcement officers are in the unique position to connect individuals to behavioral health services, particularly when encountering the same individual repeatedly. Deflection solutions provide law enforcement officers with non-enforcement options, such as referrals to case management, counseling services, emergency shelters, mental health services, and transportation.

Substance abuse and mental health disorders are a national public health emergency. The statistics in the United States are staggering - in a given year, 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness; every day in 2022 more than 295 people died after overdosing on opioids; and drug overdose deaths exceeded firearm deaths. Only 45% of people with a history of mental illness receive mental health treatment while held in local jails and about 3 in 5 people with a history of mental illness do not receive mental health treatment while incarcerated in prisons. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that the total "economic burden" of prescription opioid misuse in 2017 was \$1.02 trillion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** This policy change would enable local behavioral health providers and law enforcement with the opportunity to increase assistance in the prevention of unnecessary relapses, recidivism, and even fatalities.

**Sponsor(s):** Mary Ross Cunningham, Vice-Chair, Board of Commissioners, Lake County, Ill.