

Proposed Resolution in Support for Deflection Initiatives

Issue: Communities across the country are facing a behavioral health crisis related to substance abuse and mental health. To provide resources needed to combat the devastating impacts of the crisis, law enforcement agencies are implementing deflection programs. These innovative programs are intended to divert non-violent individuals experiencing addiction, substance use and mental health disorders from jails into community treatment programs while protecting public safety and connecting individuals directly to needed services.

Proposed Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to increase financial support for measures that maximize the ability of counties to develop and support programs that deflect non-violent individuals experiencing behavioral health crisis into treatment driven by a complete, integrated and accessible continuum of care. NACo encourages federal legislative action to expedite the creation of collaborative deflection initiatives that offer immediate pathways for non-violent individuals to 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 addiction, substance abuse and mental health disorders. Programs such as 'A Way Out' in Lake County, Illinois empower participants to get treatment to end the destructive cycle that substance abuse, dependency and addiction can cause. Regardless of insurance or ability to pay, anyone who wants help can get it just by going to a police department and asking. Based on the success of these programs, states such as Illinois (P.A. 100-1025) passed legislation which support deflection programs and provide potential funding for police departments to establish these programs.

In approximately 500 of 18,000 police departments in the U.S., have implemented deflection programs, within the past three years. With over 80 percent of police calls generally classified as non-crime related, most law enforcement call responses are social service calls that do not lead to arrests. As a result, law enforcement officers are in the unique position to refer individuals in need of help, especially when encountering the same person over and over. The deflection solution provides law enforcement officers with non-enforcement options, such as referrals to case management, counseling services, emergency shelters, mental health services, and transportation.

The mental health and substance use disorder is 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, more than 115 people die after overdosing on opioids; and drug overdose deaths exceed gun deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the total "economic burden" of prescription opioid misuse alone in the United States is \$78.5 billion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: This policy change would better enable local behavioral health providers and law enforcement the opportunity to help prevent unnecessary relapses, recidivism, and even fatalities.

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