

PROPOSED RESOLUTION  
HEALTH STEERING COMMITTEE AND  
JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY STEERING COMMITTEE

PROPOSED SUPPORT FOR DEFLECTION INITIATIVES

**Issue**

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

**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 (SB 3023) have passed legislation which support the program and provide potential funding for police departments to establish programs.

In approximately 500 of 18,000 police departments in the U.S., have implemented deflection programs, within the past two years. With over 80 percent of police calls generally classified as non-crime related, most law enforcement call responses are social service calls which do not lead to arrests. As a result, law enforcement officers often know who needs help, especially when encountering the same person over and over. <sup>i</sup> The deflection solution provides law enforcement officers with a non-enforcement option.

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 <sup>ii</sup>; every day, more than 115 people die after overdosing on opioids<sup>iii</sup>; and drug overdose deaths exceed gun deaths.<sup>iv</sup> 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. <sup>v</sup>

### **Fiscal/Rural/Urban 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.

### **Sponsors**

Hon. Aaron Lawlor, Board Chair, Lake County, Illinois

Hon. Carol Calabresa, Board Vice-Chair, Lake County, Illinois

Hon. Mary Ross Cunningham, Board Law and Judicial Committee Chair, Lake County, Illinois

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<sup>i</sup> Chicago Reporter, Instead of more policing, a model to provide more services retrieved from <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/instead-of-more-policing-a-model-to-provide-more-services/>

<sup>ii</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Mental Health by the Numbers, retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

<sup>iii</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, Opioid Overdose Crisis, citing: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality. CDC Wonder, Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2017. <https://wonder.cdc.gov>.

<sup>iv</sup> CBS News report, retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/drug-overdose-deaths-heroin-opioid-prescription-painkillers-more-than-guns/>

<sup>v</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, Opioid Overdose Crisis, citing: Florence CS, Zhou C, Luo F, Xu L. The Economic Burden of Prescription Opioid Overdose, Abuse, and Dependence in the United States, 2013. Med Care. 2016;54(10):901-906. doi:10.1097/MLR.0000000000000625.