

April 16, 2009

TO: County Mental Health Directors and California State Sheriffs

FROM: Patricia Ryan, MPA
Executive Director, California Mental Health Directors Association
and
William Kolender, San Diego County Sheriff and Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability (MHSOAC) Commissioner

SUBJECT: Joint Survey – The Knowledge and Involvement of Sheriff's in Local Planning for the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)

Thirty years ago, California drastically cut back its services in state hospitals for people with severe mental illness, without providing adequate funding for mental health services in the community. Proposition 63 was passed by voters in November 2004. It became state law January 1, 2005 and is now called the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). MHSA is intended to provide the resources to expand community mental health programs that have demonstrated their effectiveness, save lives, and save money.

Mental Health Directors and Sheriffs are well aware of the local impact of untreated mental illness. A natural partnership between mental health administrators and sheriffs has emerged as both public servant sectors share a commitment to addressing the criminalization of persons with mental illness, including incarceration. A chronic lack of resources to support community mental health results in jails often being the place individuals in need receive services. The MHSA has provided hope and an opportunity to begin to tackle this tragic outcome for so many individuals experiencing mental illness across California.

The California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA) is pleased to partner with The California State Sheriff's Association under the leadership of San Diego County Sheriff and MHSOAC Commissioner, William Kolender, to conduct this brief survey that aims to assess the awareness and involvement of law enforcement in the planning and implementation of the MHSA.

The information gained from this survey will be instructive for how we can strengthen our natural partnership and commitment to helping individuals experiencing mental illness gain access to appropriate and adequate mental health services. We encourage you take a moment to complete this survey or to forward this survey to an appropriate staff person that has been the most engaged in mental health issues and services.

We look forward to reviewing your responses, sharing the outcomes of this survey and discussing next steps based on the information gained. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Patricia Ryan, MPA
Executive Director,
California Mental Health Directors Association

Sincerely,

William Kolender,
San Diego County Sheriff and MHSOAC
Commissioner