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SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WORKING IN OUR NATION'S JAILS

## American Jail Association Resolution

### Housing of Individuals with Mental Illness in America's Jails

- WHEREAS,** a report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (June 2017) found that 1 in 4 jail inmates (26%) reported experiences that met the threshold for serious psychological distress (SPD); and
- WHEREAS,** the percentage of jail inmates with SPD (26%) was five times higher than those in the community (5%); and
- WHEREAS,** many of the individuals with mental illness who are arrested are/were clients of the mental health system and failed to gain access to effective mental health treatment.
- WHEREAS,** criminal justice officials are concerned about the increasing percentage of calls for assistance involving untreated/non-medicated mental health clients, and corresponding decreases in available community and State treatment resources.
- WHEREAS,** court officials, already overwhelmed by crowded dockets, struggle to respond appropriately to defendants with mental illness. Defendants often cycle through the courts repeatedly with the outcome failing to address long-term placement and treatment issues.
- WHEREAS,** the growing number of inmates with mental illness and the lack of appropriate resources in jails to screen, treat, and properly house these individuals strain daily jail operations and weaken staff morale. Additionally, the problem compromises the safety of staff and inmates alike, exacerbates crowding, and increases the cost of operating our Nation's jails.
- WHEREAS,** the American Jail Association feels strongly that the jail setting is not the proper therapeutic milieu for effective, long-term treatment of mental illness and recognizes that steps by State and local governments can improve the response to people with mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system;
- THEREFORE BE  
IT RESOLVED  
THAT** the American Jail Association urge its members to improve the response to people with mental illness who come in contact with the criminal justice system by developing and promoting programs, policies, and legislation that accomplish the following goals:
- Improve collaboration among stakeholders in the criminal justice and mental health systems;

*Continued*

- Integrate mental health and substance abuse services to more effectively address the needs of individuals who have co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders;
- Focus efforts toward providing the mental health system with resources and training regarding the criminal justice system;
- Recognize that the solution to this complex problem depends on an effective and accessible community mental health system;
- Support efforts to establish mental health courts that would effectively divert non-violent offenders from the criminal justice system into appropriate treatment and/or supporting social services;
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**AND, BE IT  
FURTHER  
RESOLVED  
THAT**

the American Jail Association recommend that Congress and officials from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services work with State and local government officials across ideological and partisan lines to accomplish the following:

- Assist with funding State and local governmental treatment agencies interested in developing solutions to the complex problem of people with mental illness who come in contact with the criminal justice system,
- Increase the flexibility of grant programs which enable states to obtain funds for efforts that target individuals with co-occurring disorders who are in contact with the criminal justice system,
- Collect information and improve research regarding individuals with mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system, and
- Facilitate partnerships between criminal justice and mental health agencies and organizations.

*Adopted by the American Jail Association Board of Directors on May 3, 2003.*

*Re-affirmed on May 3, 2008.*

*Revised April 21, 2018 by the AJA Board of Directors in Sacramento, California.*

**Resource: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprpji1112.pdf>**