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MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES NEW INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS HIGH RATES OF MENTALLY ILL IN NEW YORK CITY JAILS

Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Chief Policy Advisor Feinblatt Will Lead Steering Committee Investigating Program and Policy Solutions for Disproportionate Number of Mentally Ill Inmates

Mayor Bloomberg today announced the first meeting of the Mayor's Steering Committee of the Citywide Justice and Mental Health Initiative. Led by Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs and Chief Policy Advisor John Feinblatt, the committee will address the question of why, even as crime has decreased and the jail population has declined, the number of incarcerated mentally ill has risen. Committee members include Department of Correction Commissioner Dora B. Schiro, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Commissioner Tom Farley, Department of Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi, Health and Hospitals Corp. President Alan Aviles, Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Seth Diamond, and representatives from legal services, community-based organizations, district attorneys' offices and the judiciary.

"For all we've accomplished in terms of increasing public health and safety for our most vulnerable populations, more work remains to be done," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Today's first meeting, where our health and criminal justice experts will be rolling up their sleeves and dedicating their collective energy to confronting these challenges, is an important step to finding solutions to help these men and women succeed."

"How we care for vulnerable populations, imprisoned or not, says a great deal about us as a society," said Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. "The fact that the number of those imprisoned has decreased while the incarcerated mentally ill population has risen tells us there's a problem that needs to be addressed head on. This steering committee will explore new practices that will help prevent repeated incarcerations for those suffering from mental illness. I want to thank my Council colleagues Oliver Koppell and Elizabeth Crowley for serving on the committee and Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Gibbs and everyone on their team for their commitment to improving the City's criminal justice system."

"For too many, the criminal justice system is a revolving door, with one out of two mentally ill inmates returning to prison," said Deputy Mayor Gibbs. "We need to work together

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across the criminal justice and human services systems to increase public safety, improve supervision and help this special needs population connect to effective community-based health services.”

“As former chair of the Council of State Governments’ Justice Center and Chair of the New York State Committee on Corrections, I am very pleased to join the Mayor and the City’s Administration in providing a data driven, bipartisan effort to seek improvements in the way we manage the mentally ill individuals who pass through the criminal justice system,” said Assembly Member Jeffrion Aubrey. “The combination of government, community providers, district attorneys and judges is the proper prescription for addressing these complex problems.”

“This is a great opportunity and an important initiative for the City to conduct,” said Council Member Elizabeth Crowley, Chair of the City Council’s Committee on Fire & Criminal Justice. “By better understanding how we handle mentally ill offenders we will be able to form policies that both keep New Yorkers safe and work to rehabilitate inmates; I look forward to seeing the results of this study and working with the Department of Correction and all the members of this task force to identify and improve the system.”

“As Chairman of the Council Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services, I am very pleased to be participating in the Citywide Justice and Mental Health Steering Committee,” said Council Member Oliver Koppel. “I believe that the opportunity to study recidivism among mentally ill offenders is an exciting one and will lead to ground breaking strategies for successfully grappling with this increasingly disturbing trend.”

“Individuals involved in our criminal justice system deserve the care and support they need, both inside our prison system and upon release,” said Chief Policy Advisor Feinblatt. “This Steering Committee is committed to investigating the specific challenges this population faces and ensuring their needs are in fact being addressed. Doing so is good for defendants and good for the community.”

“The jails are increasingly a place of last resort for offenders who are chronically mentally ill,” said Correction Commissioner Schriro. “Even as the jails’ total population continues to fall, this group just can’t get out or stay out. We look forward to learning all we can from this analysis to improve our practices to better serve the city and ensure all New Yorkers are safe and sound.”

Individuals with mental illness come to jail and return to jail more frequently and spend longer in jail than individuals without a mental health diagnosis, even when the severity of their criminal charges and histories are similar. As a result, one-third of the jail population is now diagnosed as mentally ill. For every two mentally ill inmates released from the Department of Correction, one returns to jail within a year, and when readmitted, remains in jail for nearly three times as long as an offender without a mental health diagnosis.

As part of the as the focus of a far-reaching initiative, researchers will use New York City as a model to analyze the path travelled by people with mental illness as they move

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through the criminal justice system. Through an analysis of data and interviews with staff on the front lines of the criminal justice and health systems, researchers will identify the factors that drive the long length of stay and high rates of readmission among people with mental illnesses. The analysis will lead to practice and policy proposals to ensure these individuals receive the best treatment possible in the continuum of criminal justice and mental health care. At the same time, the State’s Medicaid Redesign Team – of which Deputy Mayor Gibbs is a member and Co-Chair of the Behavioral Health Subcommittee – will be considering substantial reforms to the Medicaid-funded behavioral health care system in New York City. The redesigns will provide opportunities to better coordinate policies, practices and transitions across these systems.

The project, expected to present recommendations by this winter, is being closely watched by state criminal justice officials who also have the same concentration of long-staying mentally-ill inmates in the prisons. New York City’s size as the second-largest jail system in the U.S. is also expected to provide meaningful results for the rest of the country where other cities and states are grappling with the same issues.

“We wanted to conduct this national demonstration project in New York City because of the commitment of Mayor Bloomberg and his cabinet to this issue, the pioneering efforts of nonprofit service providers, and the quality data available here,” said Michael Thompson, director of the Council of State Governments Justice Center. “We think other local governments across the U.S. will learn a lot from what New York City finds through these analyses.”

The analysis is being conducted by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, a nationally recognized research and policy organization, with the NYC Departments of Correction and Health and Mental Hygiene, and is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation. The collaboration also includes the Department of Probation, and other City government and community-based human service providers. State participants include the Governor’s Office and the New York State Office of Mental Health.

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