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New “Re-entry” Services Aim to Reduce Criminal Relapse, Rebuild Lives of Harford County Inmates

BEL AIR, Md., (Dec. 14, 2015) - Harford County Government and the Harford County Sheriff's Office have partnered on a new initiative aimed at reducing recidivism, or relapse into criminal activity, by inmates in Harford County. Presently, the county's recidivism rate is between 44% and 48%. Of those who choose to reoffend, most do so within a year of their release, and many reoffend within 48 hours.

Recidivism results in increased crime, which is also costly for taxpayers and the criminal justice system. Reducing recidivism is a challenge because often the underlying causes are linked to complex social problems such as addiction, poverty, childhood hunger, abuse, homelessness, underlying mental health issues and unemployment.

Under the new initiative, County Executive Barry Glassman's administration and Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler's office have collaborated to hire a part-time re-entry mediation coordinator. The coordinator will work directly with inmates and partner organizations, including the Harford County Health Department, to develop re-entry plans that incorporate treatment and support services such as housing, education and employment. Through re-entry mediation, inmates will also have an opportunity prior to their release to reconcile with family members, address conflicts, and collectively plan to return to the community.

“People are less likely to return to prison if they have jobs, access to treatment resources, and a safe place to live,” said County Executive Glassman. “Offering inmates the opportunity to rebuild relationships and make plans before their release will ensure a smoother transition back

into society. This will reduce recidivism and increase the rate of successful re-entry. By offering these preemptive services we assist families in crisis; and strong families make strong communities. The program will also dovetail nicely with the governor's Justice Reinvestment initiative."

Participation in re-entry mediation programs significantly impacts recidivism outcomes of arrest, conviction, incarceration and returns to prison. National studies show that the probability of arrest is reduced by 13% for those who participate in mediation; with each mediation session, the probability of arrest is reduced by an additional 8%.

"Protecting our community involves more than making arrests; it involves creating new and innovative ways to reduce crime," said Sheriff Gahler. "For this reason, we are pleased to partner with the Glassman administration to provide additional re-entry services at the Harford County Detention Center. Successful transition back into the community, after incarceration, leads to lower recidivism rates and productive community members."

Currently, at the Harford County Detention Center, the Harford County Health Department provides Vivitrol treatment, addiction and mental health screening, and assistance with Medicaid enrollment. The new re-entry mediation coordinator position, which is 29 hours per week, will work in concert with the existing Harford County Detention Center Re-entry Program while adding to those efforts. The Harford County Sheriff's Office will contribute \$12,000 from the Inmate Wellness Fund and Harford County will contribute \$20,000 from the Department of Community Services Mediation Program, which is grant-funded.

The Reverend Joan Webster, with Hosanna AME Church in Darlington, has been an advocate for re-entry services in Harford County. "I am truly excited about the Sheriff's Office and the Department of Community Services partnering to hire a re-entry mediation coordinator," she said. "If the research holds true for Harford County, this step will not only assist those returning from incarceration to integrate into the community, but also help to significantly reduce recidivism to detention."

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