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Judicial Council Chosen to Participate in National Criminal Justice Project

California one of 7 states to study improved outcomes For mentally ill in criminal justice system

San Francisco—The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center announced today that the Judicial Council of California has been selected to participate in a national project designed to assist state judicial leaders in their efforts to improve responses to people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. (*Chief Justices' Criminal Justice / Mental Health Leadership Initiative*)

The CSG Justice Center solicited applications from chief justices across the country interested in establishing a statewide task force on criminal justice/mental health issues. Twenty-three states submitted applications for the initiative, from which seven were selected.

As part of the initiative, the task forces will receive technical assistance, access to leading national experts, and a small amount of funding support. The Justice Center will also convene a two-day national policy forum for the seven states in the spring.

Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton, co-chair of the advisory board that reviewed the applications, congratulated leaders in California:

“The application process was very competitive. The states selected had to demonstrate that they had engaged legislative and executive branch leaders, and that their task force had the potential to yield a viable, comprehensive plan. California clearly demonstrated the broad base of leadership necessary to make the plan successful, and we look forward to working with the state in the upcoming year.”

California's Council on Mentally Ill Offenders has estimated that between 12 and 20% of incarcerated persons in California suffer from

some degree of mental illness. At the national level, a Bureau of Justice report (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/mhppji.pdf) found that half of all prisoners have mental illness, defined by a history of mental illness, symptoms of mental illness, or both history and symptoms. This report was based on a 2004 census of all state jails and prisons.

According to a 2006 report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly a quarter of both state prisoners and jail inmates who reported they had a mental health problem had served three or more prior sentences to incarceration. These statistics highlight the system wide impacts of mentally ill offenders.

“Improving outcomes for people with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system requires extensive collaboration among leaders in the judiciary, the legislature, and the administrators of multiple state agencies,” said Mass. Rep. Mike Festa and chair of the Justice Center Board of Directors. “We established this initiative because in many states, a state supreme court’s chief justice is uniquely positioned to convene and lead a multi-branch discussion on this issue that leads to real, meaningful action.”

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities. This project is coordinated through the Judges’ Criminal Justice/Mental Health Leadership Initiative, managed by the Justice Center in partnership with the National GAINS Center.

For more information on the Judges’ Criminal Justice/Mental Health Leadership Initiative, please visit <http://consensusproject.org/JLI>.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.