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State Task Force Seeks to Improve Ways to Handle Mental Health Cases in Criminal Justice System

Judicial Council Takes Other Actions on Judicial Branch Education, Civil Counsel Act, and Court Facilities

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California today received a comprehensive report from the Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues that makes 137 recommendations for improving practice and procedure in cases involving both adult and juvenile offenders with mental illness.

“This report is being presented at a time when courts and our mental health and criminal justice partners are looking for ways to more effectively respond to individuals with mental illness in the criminal justice system,” said Presiding Justice Brad R. Hill, chair of the task force. Hill is presiding justice of the Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, in Fresno.

“Members brought to the table diverse perspectives on the nature of the problem and different approaches for tackling complex issues,” Presiding Justice Hill continued. “By drawing upon each other’s differences in experiences and backgrounds, as well as a shared dedication to creating more effective responses to the problem, task force members were able to develop this blueprint for improving responses to criminally involved persons with mental illness.”

The task force is one of seven projects launched nationwide with funding and technical assistance support from the national Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project of the Council of State Governments. The Consensus Project is designed to encourage state and local leaders to address the complex and serious problem arising from the over-representation of persons with mental illness in the criminal justice system. The task force is also supported by the California Department of Mental Health with funding from the Mental Health Services Act.

The ultimate goal of the task force was to address ways to improve outcomes and reduce recidivism rates for offenders with mental illness while being mindful of cost and public safety considerations.

Task force recommendations are designed to:

- Promote innovative and effective practices to foster the fair and efficient processing and resolution of cases involving mentally ill persons in the criminal justice system;
- Expand education programs for the judicial branch, State Bar members, law enforcement, and mental health service providers to address the needs of offenders with mental illness;
- Foster excellence through implementation of evidence-based practices for serving persons with mental illness; and
- Encourage collaboration among criminal justice partners and other stakeholders to facilitate interagency and interbranch efforts that reduce recidivism and promote improved access to treatment for persons with mental illness.

At the recommendation of the task force, Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye will appoint a committee to create an action plan for implementing the task force's recommendations. www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemo.pdf.

OTHER ACTIONS

Case Management System: In an informational report on the California Court Case Management System (CCMS), Justice Terence L. Bruiniers, chair of the CCMS Oversight Committee, reported that the CCMS project team had successfully completed testing on the core CCMS product. The statewide testing team, consisting of 70 judges, court employees, AOC staff, and professional testers, has spent the last 12 weeks putting the product through various scenarios using existing case information. The next step is to begin testing on “external” components, which include e-filing, data exchanges, public access portals, and the statewide data warehouse. This next level of testing is expected to be completed by the end of July.

In other matters today, the Judicial Council:

Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act: Agreed to award \$9.5 million in grants to provide legal representation and improved court services to low-income Californians in critical civil cases affecting basic human needs. The pilot projects will be operated by seven legal services nonprofit corporations working in collaboration with their local superior courts. Legal representation will be provided to low-income litigants who are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and need representation in the areas of housing, probate guardianships and conservatorships, domestic violence, and child custody actions initiated by a parent seeking sole legal or physical custody of a child. The pilot projects are authorized by the Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act, Government Code sections 68650 and

68651. For the names of the organizations and courts to be funded as pilot projects, see page 2 of this report: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemp-revt.pdf> .

Judicial Branch Education: Received a comprehensive report on the implementation of the judicial branch education rules during their first three years of operation (2007–2009). The report showed that the vast majority of justices and judges participated in continuing education as specified in the judicial education rules: 99 percent of justices of the Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal met the continuing education requirement, and 93.4 percent of trial court judges completed the recommended continuing education.

A survey also revealed that the majority of judicial officers had positive perceptions about the education rules in the California Rules of Court. The judicial branch education program is designed to fulfill the council’s goal of providing educational and professional development to enhance the ability of all individuals serving in the judicial branch to achieve high standards of professionalism, ethics, and performance.

www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemk.pdf.

Other Education Reports: Heard a report on a new two-year model for planning and delivering judicial branch education that provides for greater oversight by the Governing Committee of the Center for Judicial Education and Research and revises the roles and operational structures involved in this effort. www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429iteml.pdf. Received another report on four educational partnerships that have resulted in successful degree- or certificate-bearing programs for current and prospective court employees. www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemj.pdf.

New Inyo County Courthouse: Approved a recommendation to build the new Inyo County Courthouse in the Bishop area because that location will improve access to justice for the majority of Inyo County residents. Given the limited funding available for more than one courthouse in Inyo County, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) recommended locating the courthouse in the Bishop area as the best use of state resources. This recommendation was subject to public review and comment and submitted for council approval as a controversial site. The court plans to continue providing full services in Independence. The costs to build a new courthouse in the Bishop area will be funded by court user fees, as set forth in Senate Bill 1407 (Stats. 2008, ch. 311), and will not involve use of the state's General Fund. www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemi.pdf.

Court Awards: Approved seven recipients of the 2010–2011 Ralph N. Kleps Awards, which honor courts for implementing innovative programs that improve the administration of justice. www.courts.ca.gov/xbcr/cc/20110429itemq.pdf.

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 ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.