



News for Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Courts Hold First Statewide Behavioral Health Summit

HARRISBURG — More than 500 judges, industry leaders and stakeholders gathered this week for a first-annual Pennsylvania Courts statewide summit focused on improving court responses to behavioral health challenges within the judicial system.

“Communities across the country continue to fight a battle against what is sometimes a silent and invisible opponent – the mental and behavioral health crisis.” Justice Dougherty said. “Over the course of the last decade, courts have seen the behavioral health crisis grow in severity, frequency and intensity and the Pennsylvania judicial system is not immune.

“This first-of-its-kind summit is our “call to action” bringing together our county, judicial and advocacy partners all focused on using their experience and expertise to change and save lives, while expanding solutions in the courts to better respond to court users with behavioral health needs.

“We all have a responsibility to be the change that vulnerable Pennsylvanians need. The judiciary is proud to stand with its partners to meet these challenges head on, in support of those justice-involved individuals who need it most.”

Hosted in partnership with the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and spearheaded by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty, the summit gives county treatment teams, judges, government partners and advocates the opportunity to collaborate while creating a roadmap to address the worsening national behavioral health crisis, which impacts all aspects of the judiciary.

“This summit represents a pivotal initiative aimed at enhancing the intersection of mental health and the judicial system, much like the work of PCCD’s Mental Health and Justice Advisory Committee. As courts increasingly encounter individuals with behavioral health issues, there is a pressing need for a coordinated response that ensures both effective legal proceedings and compassionate, trauma-informed care. That’s why I am thankful that AOPC has brought you all together for this summit,” said Mike Pennington, PCCD Executive Director.

“By building relationships and fostering understanding among judges, mental health professionals, advocates, and community organizations, we can develop informed strategies that truly make a difference.”

In May, the Pennsylvania Courts announced the creation of the Office of Behavioral Health,

focused on identifying gaps in the behavioral health system, addressing key issues including access to services and support, and pinpointing intersections between at-risk populations and the courts in a wide range of matters including truancy, domestic relations, juvenile delinquency and dependency, criminal justice and civil commitments.

Recognizing the importance of training and education, the courts' behavioral health team also works to develop training opportunities for judges and remains committed to creating a roadmap to resources and services available statewide.

More information about the Office of Behavioral Health and its work is available [here](#).

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