



News for Immediate Release

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## **Pennsylvania Courts Host First Regional Summit to Address Growing Behavioral Health Crisis**

**HARRISBURG** — Focused on combatting the growing behavioral health crisis sweeping Pennsylvania and the nation, the Pennsylvania Courts together with Supreme Court Justice Kevin M. Dougherty and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency today hosted a first of its kind summit in Chester County.

Spearheaded by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty, these events are part of the Court's Behavioral Health in the Courts initiative and are designed to strengthen partnerships between the judiciary, system partners, behavioral health providers and community stakeholders to improve outcomes for individuals with behavioral health challenges who come into contact with the justice system.

"Mental health challenges are no longer a quiet issue on the sidelines; they are a full-blown crisis affecting every part of life in Pennsylvania," said Supreme Court Justice Kevin M. Dougherty. "Families, schools, employers, and emergency rooms are all feeling the strain. And so are our courts. One of the biggest challenges we face in addressing behavioral health issues is breaking down silos that prevent people from getting care and support they need.

"Judges across the Commonwealth are seeing more cases where mental illness is a major factor. Whether it's in criminal court, family matters, or child welfare proceedings, the need for effective behavioral health support is undeniable. The courts cannot solve this crisis alone, but we stand ready to be a critical part of the solution.

"These regional summits will give us a chance to come together as partners to ensure our responses are more informed, compassionate and effective."

Today's summit in Chester County is the first of seven planned meetings statewide, bringing together judges, court staff, behavioral health professionals, county and state officials, law enforcement and others working at the intersection of justice and behavioral health.

The goal is to share best practices, address challenges, and continue building a coordinated approach that prioritizes treatment and support over cyclical court involvement and incarceration.

Sessions during the summit will include discussions on key issues with partners to address mental and behavioral health challenges in Pennsylvania including Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty, members of the General Assembly, and

representatives from the governor's Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania and representatives from law enforcement and the behavioral health communities.

"We are grateful and fortunate to have so many individuals with significant experience and expertise participate in this first regional summit," Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Andrea Tuominen said. "Today's discussion will bring us one step closer to identifying gaps in the system where partnerships can be formed, resources identified and pathways to services and supports cultivated that will benefit those in need.

"While the courts play a critical role in addressing this growing crisis, we cannot do it alone or in a vacuum. These partnerships are vitally important in working together to change and save lives."

The Behavioral Health in the Courts initiative supports court-led strategies to better connect individuals with services and reduce the cycle of crisis, arrest and recidivism. The regional summits will focus on practical strategies for collaboration, diversion programs, crisis response, and access to person-centered care.

More information about the summits and the Behavioral Health in the Court initiative is available through the Pennsylvania Courts website and social media ([FaceBook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#))

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