

Mental Health and Criminal Justice

Mental Illness is a serious problem in the criminal justice system. Approximately 25% of the U.S. prison and 60% of the jail population has a serious mental illness. People with mental illness serve longer sentences and are placed in segregation at higher rates. In cities with a population of 100,000 or more, approximately 7% of all police contact involves people with mental illness, and those with mental illness are twice as likely to be arrested for repeated behavior.

Many people with mental illness have repeated encounters with the criminal justice system without ever receiving treatment or support services for their illness. Many lose their health care and financial benefits when arrested and upon release have no way to obtain medication or treatment. It is clear that the traditional treatment and methods of the criminal justice system do not adequately meet the needs of people with mental illness and do not effectively deal with public safety.

The Mental Health Legislative Network Supports:

- Requiring the Department of Corrections to develop a process for people to earn their way out of disciplinary confinement
- Expanding general assistance medical care for inmates diagnosed with mental illness for three months after they leave jail (HF 572)
- Requiring Minnesota to suspend, not terminate, federal benefits
- Requiring mental health assessments for pre-sentence investigation purposes if mental illness was a contributing factor
- Requiring a mental health screening tool to be used as part of intake procedures for new prisoners
- Funding grants to county boards for jail discharge planning projects (SF 859/HF 1146)
- Increasing funding for discharge planning for offenders with serious and persistent mental illness (SF 859/HF 1146)
- Appropriating money to the supreme court to develop and implement standards for mental health courts (SF 859/HF 1146)
- Creating a statewide police Crisis Intervention Council (SF 1066/HF 936))
- Creating a mental health fatality review team (SF 1067/HF 923)

All these provisions are also contained in HF 196 and SF 148.

For more information contact:
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