

Our Local Jails --

'Defacto Mental Health Institutions' -- Sheriff Rahr

In a 2009 census of the King County jail inmate population, Jail Health staff determined that over 700 inmates or 32% of the entire jail population had been diagnosed with mental illness. In June 2010, our jail had a daily average of 150 inmates housed in the jail's psychiatric unit, with an average of 44 of those inmates in acute psychiatric care.

What does this mean? While the county has experienced a 17% decrease in overall jail population since 2004, the offenders with mental illness

Police collaborate with Mental Health Cohort

A mental health professional from Downtown Emergency Services Center was expected to be working alongside Seattle police by the end of October, officials said.

The Seattle Police Department in August hired the agency to provide a fulltime mental health worker to assist officers with calls involving people with serious mental illness.

The pilot program makes Seattle police just one of a handful of departments around the country offering a similar such service.

"I'm really excited," said Graydon Andrus, Director of Clinical Programs for DESC. "It's the first time we've taken the step to so overtly collaborate."

The mental health professional chosen for the job has a Master's degree in Social Work and has worked in the field for more than six years, Andrus said. He has worked at DESC for four years, gaining experience with the population he'll be working with, Andrus added. Two mental health supervisors also will participate in the program and serve as backup when the worker is sick or on vacation, he said.

Seattle police say they have about 130 contacts a week with mentally ill people. While the incidents usually don't involve serious crimes, they're some of the most time-consuming and difficult to resolve.

Nearly 300 of the department's 1,350 officers have received week-long training on how to respond to crises involving people with mental illness. Partnering with a mental health agency represents another step toward more effective response to those situations, police said.

Funding for the program comes from a two-year, \$250,000 grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

— *Anne Koch*

The Voice - Page 14 of 16 - Fall 2010

population has increased by over 12% during the same period.

Mentally ill defendants spend an average of 28 days in jail while all other inmates spend about 18 days. For the past 30-plus years, federal policy has been to suspend benefits such as Medicaid and Medicare for eligible inmates (including juveniles with mental illness) as soon as they are booked into jail - before any determination of guilt or innocence has been made.

The burden then shifts to *our* community to pay for all health benefits for those inmates - including the extremely complex needs of mentally ill offenders.

The local jails in America have

become the defacto mental health institutions in this country— with skyrocketing costs being shifted to our local economy and county budgets. It is why I have been working for the last three years with our Congressional delegation, the National Sheriffs Association, and a growing national coalition of first responder, treatment, and healthcare advocates, to demonstrate that the current policy is the wrong public policy where mentally ill offenders are concerned.

It is hoped that **THE INMATES WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND PUBLIC SAFETY ACT OF 2010** will be introduced in Congress this year with bipartisan support. It is time to change the way we deal with those offenders with mental illness who should be properly treated rather than continuously recycled through our criminal justice and local jail system. It is a change that could save lives as well as critical local resources. More to come...

(Reprinted from King County Sheriff Sue Rahr's newsletter to constituents and law enforcement colleagues)

The inmates with mental illness and public safety act of 2010

New NAMI Treasurer appointed

Kathy Chiles of Woodinville and a member of NAMI Snohomish affiliate, has been appointed treasurer of NAMI Washington and to serve on the state board. Kathy brings a strong background in construction management to the office.

President Farrell Adrian said Ms. Chiles will succeed Evonne Noble, elected to the Board in August, but whose work and educational pursuits would prevent her continuing as treasurer.