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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.

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.

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