

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, February 12, 2014

Contact: Tyler Lowry, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-6630
Hanna Greer, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-5848

FRANKLIN COUNTY LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO ASSESS AND IMPROVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

The Franklin County Criminal Justice Planning Board held its first quarterly meeting of the year today and launched an exciting initiative: the County Justice and Behavioral Health Systems Improvement Project. The goal of the initiative is to improve public safety and public health outcomes for people with mental health and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system. The project aims to demonstrate how counties can use data to improve such outcomes, and is part of a national effort to use a research-based framework to promote public safety and recovery and prioritize scarce criminal justice and behavioral health resources.

“This is an exciting opportunity to build on efforts already underway such as specialized dockets and reentry initiatives,” said Marilyn Brown, President of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners and Chair of the Reentry Coalition. “This approach will help us quickly hone in on what’s working and where the barriers to effective treatment are in order to break the links between mental health, substance abuse, and revolving incarceration.”

“People with behavioral health needs are cycling in and out of our jails, and that’s not an effective place to get treatment. This project can help us develop collaborative solutions to break this cycle,” said Sheriff Zach Scott. “If we identify and target the right people and efficiently connect them to community-based mental health services, we can increase public safety and put people with untreated mental illnesses on path to recovery.”

As part of the effort, Franklin County will receive intensive technical assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG Justice Center), a national nonprofit organization with experience working on initiatives like this at the state and local level—ranging from Bexar County, TX to New York City. Over the next year, members of Franklin County’s Criminal Justice Planning Board will work closely with the CSG Justice Center to identify data and priorities for analysis. The findings will be used to develop policy options and implementation strategies put forth in a report in 2015.

“We need to identify people with treatment needs in the criminal justice system and use the most up-to-date research to guide our response,” said David Royer, the CEO of the Franklin County Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Board. “This project will help to develop a continuum of care that provides a successful transition from the criminal justice system into the community.”

Franklin County is one of several jurisdictions selected as part of a larger national initiative promoting local systems planning. The effort is jointly funded by the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation.

Franklin County was selected as a demonstration site for the program because of the level of cooperation between its various agencies involved in the regional criminal justice systems. The Franklin County Sheriff’s Office, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County, the Franklin County Office of Homeland Security and Justice Programs, the Columbus City Attorney’s Office, the Franklin County Prosecutor and Public Defender offices, and leadership from

the Franklin County Municipal and Common Pleas Courts and Probation departments will all work together on the project.

Scott Moyer, President of the Langeloth Foundation noted, “We look to fund projects where stakeholders come together and commit to using data to jointly address this complex issue. We are particularly interested in this project because it’s a good investment to promote these approaches not only in Franklin County but across the country.”

According to BJA Director Denise O’Donnell, “The challenges in Franklin County are much like those faced by criminal justice and behavioral health leaders around the country. We hope this project will identify solutions that others can learn from.”

The Franklin County Board of Commissioners appoints the twenty-two members of the Franklin County Criminal Justice Planning Board whose members consist of local elected officials and representatives from the fields of corrections, law enforcement, the courts, the developmental disabilities community, as well as community representation.

###

For more information on the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, log on to: www.franklincountyohio.gov/commissioners