



## **News for Immediate Release**

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### **Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Settles Lawsuit with the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania**

*Department Continues to Implement Measures to Enhance Treatment and Care of Inmates Suffering from Serious Mental Illness*

**Harrisburg** – The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) has reached settlement with the Disability Rights Network (DRN) of Pennsylvania on a lawsuit that the organization filed in March 2013 concerning the treatment of inmates diagnosed with serious mental illness (SMI). DRN is a federally-mandated organization that advocates for the civil rights of individuals with disabilities.

The settlement agreement outlines procedures to divert inmates with serious mental illness who have demonstrated problematic behavior to specialized treatment units where they will receive enhanced mental health care, programs and services, instead of traditional restricted housing units. The agreement calls for the appointment of an independent technical compliance consultant who will independently assess and report on the DOC's implementation of the agreement's terms. The term of the agreement will extend for two to five years depending upon how quickly the DOC can successfully implement the agreement's terms.

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel applauded the agreement, stressing that "the DOC and the DRN share a common goal – the safe and appropriate delivery of mental health services for inmates who suffer from serious mental illness."

Wetzel described the agreement as another example of the DOC "stepping up to do the right thing" to address the issue of the DOC's burgeoning population of inmates with serious mental illness.

"Unfortunately, prisons and jails have become the defacto system responsible for treating the mentally ill. While we continue to step up and face this challenge, we also must continue to call for better and more abundant mental health services in the community. Specialty courts, such as mental health and veterans courts, provide vital treatment services where they should be delivered -- in the communities – and they divert such individuals from entering our system in the first place," Wetzel said.

Under Secretary Wetzel, the DOC has made significant improvements to its mental health system which include:

- **Establishing a Centralized Office for the Administration of Mental Health Care**
  - Establishing a Psychology Office at the Central Office level to centrally promulgate policies, track data, review incidents and provide appropriate direction for issues related to the department's delivery of mental health services.
  - Improving requirements and procedures for clinical reviews of self-injurious behaviors, suicide attempts and completed suicides.
  - Developing a centralized tracking system of all inmate self-injurious behaviors, serious suicide attempts and similar extraordinary occurrences.
  - Enhancing its special needs psychiatric review team through the use of various types of data to improve mental health services at the systemic, institutional and individual levels.
- **Development of New Misconducts Procedures to Divert Inmates with SMI from Restricted Housing Units**
  - The development of new treatment units and implementation of more robust misconduct diversionary procedures for inmates with SMI has resulted in a steep decline in the number of inmates with SMI who are currently housed in restricted units for disciplinary reasons. Currently, less than 150 inmates who are diagnosed as SMI are housed in restrictive housing units, down from nearly 850 inmates previously.
- **Vera Segregation Reduction Project**
  - The DOC has partnered with the nationally recognized Vera Institute of Justice. Vera's Segregation Reduction Project will examine the DOC's use of segregation for the overall inmate population and develop strategies to safely reduce the use of costly segregation through training, policy modifications and other initiatives.
- **Enhanced Classification and Treatment for Seriously Mentally Ill Offenders**
  - The DOC has updated its definition of SMI to better capture and track those individuals who suffer from the most severe forms of mental illness, requiring the most treatment services. Because the new definition is diagnosis driven, it better identifies individuals in need of services and ensures that they are connected to needed resources. For those inmates who require intensive treatment, a recovery model individual treatment plan is generated – with the inmate's participation

– to identify and isolate certain treatment goals that the inmate and treatment team will strive to meet together.

- **Certified Peer Support Specialist Program**
  - DOC's certified peer support specialist program has trained more than 300 inmates to provide support and counseling services to other inmates on a variety of issues, including participation in mental health treatment.
  
- **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training**
  - CIT training, first used to educate police officers to respond to mental health issues that they encounter in the community, has been modified by the DOC into an extensive multi-day training course to provide our correctional officers with an understanding of the ways in which mental illness may affect the inmates they deal with daily, and provide them with skills to deescalate crisis situations. Trainings occur several times per year and classes typically include dozens of officers and corrections personnel. Those officers whose position within institutions put them in close contact with the mentally ill have been prioritized for this critical training. The DOC is planning to offer this training to the Pennsylvania county prisons in the future.
  
- **Mental Health First Aid Training**
  - The DOC is on track to have all of its employees trained in mental health first aid by the end of fiscal year 2014. The training equips employees to understand, recognize and respond to the symptoms of mental illness.
  
- **Improved Treatment Units**
  - The DOC developed several new specialized units to address the different treatment needs of inmates with SMI, including Secure Residential Treatment Units, Behavior Management Units, Residential Treatment Units and Diversionary Treatment Units. The variety of treatment units ensures that inmates are receiving individualized care specific to their particular needs regardless of their security level. Additionally, inmates in specialized units receive – at a minimum, and often far in excess of – 20 hours of structured and unstructured programs out of their cells each week; for those inmates in general population, treatment units have even greater out-of-cell program opportunities.

- **MHM performance contracting**
  - The contract with MHM Services for inmate mental health care includes performance-based incentives and penalties. The contract provides incentives for positive outcomes for offenders to further the DOC's goal that inmates leaving the system are better than when they entered it. The contract incentivizes treatment that reduces misconduct and mental health recommitment rates for the mentally ill. Additionally, MHM will be required to maintain or exceed an established baseline medication compliance rate.
  
- **Partnering with NAMI, Rutgers, etc.**
  - The DOC has partnered with various advocacy groups and leading researchers in the field of mental illness to analyze current systems, complete a mapping of the prison's mental health system from reception to reentry and develop training and initiatives to improve mental health care. Partners include the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and Rutgers University.
  
- **Development of Suicide Prevention Committees**
  - Each state correctional institution has instituted a Suicide Prevention Committee, which includes a multi-disciplinary team of mental health and security personnel, to review serious incidents of self-harm, attempted and completed suicides. These committees will monitor policy compliance, conduct training exercises and make recommendations for improvements to policy and procedure.
  
  - Each state prison is required to conduct suicide response drills aimed at improving response times and best practices of all employees;
  
- **Trauma Screening**
  - All female inmates received at SCI Muncy will undergo a thorough trauma screening upon their reception to the institution and be connected with appropriate follow-up services.

The agreement can be viewed on the DOC's website at <http://www.cor.pa.gov/Administration/Newsroom/Pages/News-Releases.aspx>

**Media contact:** Susan McNaughton, 717-728-4025

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