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## **Unprecedented National Summit Gathers Teams from 50 Counties to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—April 18, 2016—A team of criminal justice and behavioral health professionals from Sebastian County attended a two-day summit this week that brought together select teams from U.S. communities of all sizes as part of a national initiative to address the mental health crisis in our nation's jails.

The Stepping Up Summit, which convened jail administrators, law enforcement officials, county elected officials, psychiatrists and other stakeholders from 50 jurisdictions across the country, was designed to give attendees a clear understanding of what constitutes a comprehensive, system-level plan that, when implemented, will reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail.

The team from Sebastian County consisted of Circuit Judge Anne Hendricks, County Judge David Hudson, Prosecutor Dan Shue, Guidance Center CEO Jim West and Sebastian County Sheriff Bill Hollenbeck.

**"The Stepping Up Summit was an education for our team as to the shocking number of persons incarcerated with mental health issues across the United States. I believe that diverting these nonviolent individuals from our jail will both reduce our jail population and improve the likelihood that those suffering from mental illness can become productive members of the community."---Circuit Judge Hendricks**

The 50 jurisdictions selected to attend consist of a cross-section of urban, suburban and rural counties representing 37 states. Each team includes local policymakers and stakeholders prepared to enhance efforts and take action to address this national crisis.

At the two-day summit, county teams took stock of work already underway in their counties and chart a path forward. To that end, attendees considered six questions related to the commitment of local leadership, use of screening and assessments, the level of baseline data that currently exists, tracking progress and other items.

Stepping Up was launched in May 2015 as a partnership of The Council of State Governments Justice Center, The National Association of Counties, and The American Psychiatric Association Foundation. The initiative is designed to rally national, state, and local leaders around the goal of achieving an actual reduction in the number of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders in jail. Over the past year, more than 250 counties, representing nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population, have passed resolutions to advance the goals of Stepping Up.

The progression of Stepping Up reflects a new agreement among county leaders across the country on one central truth: Jails should no longer serve as de facto psychiatric facilities. Many communities have already taken action to address the crisis locally, and many in the medical community have put its weight behind collaborating to effect change.

Despite the passionate commitments and efforts of many communities to make an impact, county leaders report there are more people with mental illnesses in jails than ever before,

and the majority are not a public safety risk. The number of people with mental illnesses in jails is three to six times higher than that of the general public.<sup>i</sup>

As a result, local budgets are strained by jails spending two to three times more on people with mental illnesses than they do on people without those needs. The exorbitant cost to taxpayers to arrest, adjudicate, segregate, and supervise these individuals is having little-to-no impact in terms of public safety or public health.

Sebastian County Leadership team and other county teams engaged with criminal justice and behavioral health experts, along with fellow county representatives from across the country, to consider the latest research and strategies and learn from the challenges and approaches other jurisdictions have experienced.

Sebastian County Leadership team members worked onsite to develop and evaluate plans to reduce mental illness in the local jail and walked away with a concrete set of priorities to take action and measure progress on their plans.

**"Incarcerating non-violent, mentally ill people in our detention center continues to result in unproductive jail stays, no treatment for the underlying mental health issue, and preventable recidivism. I believe it in our power to change this scenario and I am personally committed to do so."---Prosecutor Shue**

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<sup>i</sup> Steadman, Henry, et al., "Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness among Jail Inmates." *Psychiatric Services* 60, no. 6 (2009): 761-765. These numbers refer to jail admissions. Even greater numbers of individuals have mental illnesses that are not "serious" mental illnesses, but still require resource-intensive responses.