



**ILLINOIS
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NEWS

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**ICJIA Announces \$260,000 grant to create
Illinois Center of Excellence in Mental Health and Justice**

*New training and resource center will help maximize court and
community resources to address mentally ill offenders*

CHICAGO—June 10, 2011. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) Executive Director Jack Cutrone today announced a \$260,000 federal Justice Assistance Grant to Winnebago County for the creation of the Illinois Center of Excellence in Mental Health and Justice.

Based in Rockford and serving all Illinois counties, the center will promote, coordinate, and provide training to communities looking to implement jail diversion programs and specialty courts for mentally ill and/or substance-abusing offenders, and offenders who are military veterans.

“Mental illness is a serious problem in the criminal justice system and a significant contributor to offender recidivism,” said Director Cutrone. “By promoting and implementing courts and diversion programs specifically designed to address these issues, we can help break the cycle of offending for many of these individuals.”

Offenders with mental health issues often commit repeated non-violent crimes, resulting in repeated incarceration periods and increasing prison costs that could be avoided with proper diversion. Jails throughout Illinois are feeling the pressure as the last stop for the community’s mentally ill and few services available to assist.

A 2006 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics study of surveyed inmates showed that 75 percent of female inmates and 63 percent of male inmates in local jails were suffering with a mental health problem. However, many jurisdictions do not have the information

and training necessary to implement effective interventions to address mentally ill or substance abusing offenders, and lack resources to engage in system change without external technical assistance.

“The criminal justice system’s traditional models of case processing have not proven adequate to handle the problems of those persons with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse,” said Second District Appellate Justice Kathryn E. Zenoff, chair of the Special Supreme Court Judicial Advisory Committee for Justice and Mental Health Planning and co-facilitator of the Center of Excellence planning group with Dr. Anderson Freeman, Deputy Director of Forensic Services with the Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health. “Communities and courts need innovative alternatives and the knowledge and training of newer therapeutic approaches to more effectively address these populations in their jurisdictions.”

The Center of Excellence in Mental Health and Justice will be housed at the University of Illinois School of Medicine in Rockford, with satellites at other University of Illinois sites in Chicago, Peoria, Springfield, and Urbana/Champaign. Grant funding will support full- and part-time staff and program evaluators.

The center will contact counties and judicial circuits to provide evidence-based training, coordination, and implementation assistance to create mental health courts, drug courts, and veterans’ courts, and offer alternatives to incarceration. The center also will assist in training treatment providers to deal with the unique needs of these offenders.

Center planning and program development was overseen by an advisory planning committee of representatives from ICJIA, Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health, Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), Mental Health Court Association of Illinois, Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, and members of the Special Supreme Court Judicial Advisory Committee for Justice and Mental Health Planning.

ICJIA is dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice with work in the areas of grants administration, research and analysis, policy and planning, and information systems and technology. ICJIA is coordinating a collaborative, statewide strategic planning process that emphasizes evidence-based criminal justice practices to formulate policy, research, and funding direction for the next several years. Visit www.icjia.state.il.us for more information.

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