



Orange County News

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District Attorney Hoovler Announces Award of Training and Technical Assistance to Establish Prosecutor-Led Diversion Program

Orange County Named as One of Five Jurisdictions in the Country to Begin Development of Diversion Initiative

Orange County District Attorney David M. Hoovler announced on Tuesday, January 24, 2017, that the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has awarded the District Attorney's Office a program of training and technical assistance to develop a prosecutor-led diversion initiative in Orange County. The assistance will be administered by the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, and will be directly provided to the District Attorney's Office by the Center for Court Innovation. Orange County is one of five jurisdictions in the United States to receive the first grants of assistance, as part of BJA's effort to develop prosecutor-led diversion programs in diverse regions of the country. Other jurisdictions receiving the first grants of assistance are such varied areas as Dallas, Texas; Santa Barbara, California; Deschutes County in central Oregon; and the Fourth Circuit Court District in the Mississippi Delta.

The District Attorney's Office has already begun to involve other Orange County agencies in the prosecutor-led diversion effort. Those agencies include the Orange County Departments of Mental Health and Social Services, the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Council of Orange County, St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital, and Cornerstone Family Health Care. Over time, the initiative will seek to include other service providers throughout the area.

Prosecutor-led diversion programs are designed to enhance the ability of prosecutors to remove appropriate defendants from the criminal justice system and send them into rehabilitation programs, where they might be able to address issues that lead them to commit crimes, and so that they might avoid getting criminal convictions for their offenses. The program would allow the District Attorney's Office to coordinate referral of offenders to existing treatment programs, and would also allow the District Attorney's Office to develop new diversion programs, in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders. Offenders with drug problems, other than drug sellers, and those with alcohol problems, mental health issues, or other challenges might all be

diverted from the criminal justice system into treatment programs that would help them to avoid reoffending. The result could be fewer future crimes, fewer days that offenders spend in jail, and reduced costs to the criminal justice system.

“Since before I took office,” said District Attorney Hoovler, “I have believed that the role of a prosecutor is not simply to put people in jail. Instead, I firmly believe that we all benefit from efforts to treat offenders for the conditions that lead them to commit their crimes in the first place. In reality, diversion provides us with one more weapon in the fight against drugs. Offenders who receive appropriate treatment programs are less likely to commit crimes in the future, so that they and potential victims are less at-risk. In addition, if we can reduce the number of crimes committed, or reduce the amount of time that those offenders spend in jail, we all benefit from reduced costs to the criminal justice system. Properly-developed diversion programs are a win-win for everyone, and I hope that we can use BJA’s assistance to establish such a program in my office.”

“I applaud District Attorney Hoovler's leadership in this prosecutorial diversion effort,” said Darcie Miller, Commissioner of the Orange County Departments of Mental Health and Social Services. “With his office leading this initiative, it has the potential to have far-reaching impact across the county, allowing for an expansion in criminal justice diversion that will lead to improved linkage to treatment and increased opportunity for recovery for those challenged with mental health or substance-abuse disorders. The Departments of Mental Health and Social Services are 100% committed to assisting with the success of this initiative.”

“In the 25 years that the Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Council of Orange County (ADAC) has been providing alternatives to incarceration through the Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities program,” said Jim Conklin, Executive Director of ADAC, “we have seen tremendous success when people are able to address their substance use disorder and their criminal justice issues concurrently. Those successes have even resulted in past participants of our program returning to ADAC as employees and also as Board members.”

“St. Luke’s Cornwall Hospital is proud to partner with District Attorney Hoovler in the establishment of a prosecutor-led diversion program,” said Joan Cusack-McGuirk, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Hospital. “SLCH shares the District Attorney’s belief that those suffering from the disease of addiction require assessment of the root cause of conditions leading to criminal acts. This is not to condone criminal behavior, but to address the risky behaviors that addiction is often responsible for. We are proud to be part of the District Attorney’s prosecutor-led diversion initiative, as it is grounded in treating the root cause, instead of placing a Band-Aid on ‘the symptoms.’ ”

“This partnership between the Orange County District Attorney’s Office and Cornerstone Family Healthcare is yet another testament to the DA’s understanding of the benefits of implementing a coordinated, comprehensive effort to effectively treat opioid-use disorders,” said Linda Muller,

President and Chief Executive Officer of Cornerstone Family Healthcare. “We are grateful for his rising support of medication-assisted treatment as a long-term recovery option and applaud his approach to adopting policies that prioritize mental health and drug treatment instead of prosecution as an alternative to incarceration for low-level offenders. With the right treatment and supports, a person with addiction can regain a healthy, productive life. Cornerstone looks forward to expanding our reach to meet the needs of those in our county who are affected by this complex disease in the many adverse ways.”

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