



NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

JONATHAN F. THOMPSON
Executive Director and CEO

December 18, 2019

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

On February 7, 2017, President Donald J. Trump met with the executive leadership of the National Sheriffs' Association in the Oval Office. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the nationwide challenges sheriffs are facing while attempting to manage our country's opioid epidemic and the mental health crisis facing our nation's jails, particularly the impact on crime, recidivism and jail administration. All attending parties acknowledged that our nation's jails have become the largest de facto mental health hospitals for persons with severe mental illness, many of whom also have substance use and/or co-occurring disorders. Due to the lack of resources available to local jurisdictions, the mental health crisis is particularly difficult to combat and contributes to the increase in recidivism in the criminal justice system. The nation's sheriffs were challenged by President Trump to propose solutions for the mental health crisis as it relates to their jails and respective communities. The National Sheriffs' Association willingly accepted the call to action.

As part of an ongoing effort, on June 26 and June 27, 2019, the National Sheriffs' Association and the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) hosted the All Sheriffs' Authority meeting to address the impact of the mental health crisis on the nation's jails.

The National Sheriffs' Association's All Sheriffs' Authority is a collaborative effort to study and respond to issues and challenges facing the nation's sheriffs. Members of the All Sheriffs' Authority were convened from urban and rural areas and presented diverse perspectives on how the mental health crisis is manifested in their respective communities. The sheriffs articulated their unique challenges, concerns, needs, and current efforts in response to the crisis.

The consensus of the meeting was clear: The federal government must address the issues that contribute to individuals committing criminal acts, including mental illness, substance use and co-occurring disorders. The nation's sheriffs are committed to using their unique role to advocate for increased mental health

The Honorable William Barr
December 17, 2019
Page Two

treatment and other necessary support services. Because sheriffs are elected officers, sworn to uphold the Constitution, they bring a unique capacity to address this crisis. As the chief law enforcement officers in their communities, sheriffs have the capacity, drive, leadership skills, and ability to convene, and authority to develop, realistic and solution-based programs to address the mental health challenges.

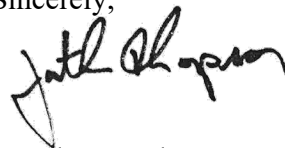
The nation's sheriffs must be provided the resources necessary to lead this effort. As such, the National Sheriffs' Association requests support for the recommendations outlined in the attached report:

1. Establish a National Policy Initiative to Increase Education and Raise Awareness of the Nation's Mental Health Crisis and its Impact on Law Enforcement, Jails, Behavioral Health Systems, and the Safety of our Communities;
2. Establish Integrated Crisis Response, Diversion and Jail-Based Mental Health Services;
3. Develop and Support Cohesive and Evidence Based Reentry Programs;
4. Include Opportunities and Strategies for Sheriffs, Mental Health Leaders, the Private Sector and Community Stakeholders to Contribute to Federal and State Policy Development;
5. Fund Enhanced Training for Correctional Staff Regarding Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders;
6. Increase Resources for Rural Communities; and,
7. Continue the Support for DOJ's Jails Technical Assistance and Training Support Working Group.

Thank you for the steadfast support that you have provided America's sheriffs through the efforts of the National Institute of Corrections, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

In closing, we ask for your continued assistance in developing and supporting the funding of the proposed recommendations. We look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice to create a safer America.

Sincerely,



Jonathan F. Thompson
Executive Director and CEO

Attachment: Hard copy All Sheriffs' Authority 2019: 2019 Mental Health Report

cc: Sheriff Daron Hall, President
Katherine Sullivan, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General
Jeffrey Favitta, Special Advisor to the Attorney General, DOJ

https://www.sheriffs.org/asa_mentalhealth_report