

# WEEKLY POLICY SUMMARY:

## Mental Health & Law Enforcement

### March 22, 2019

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#### Praise For Law Enforcement's Handling Of Mental Health Challenges

1. [Columbia Daily Tribune](#): Zondra Clark, the mother of an autistic son, praised Columbia, Missouri police for calming her son down, holding his hand, and joining him in prayer in response to Clark's 911 call for police assistance when her autistic son Joseph Smith began showing signs of aggression as he began a mental health episode. Clark explained her son needed immediate medical attention, but "as a family we couldn't safely transport him for the urgent help he needed." Clark said she "will never forget" the police officers who "engaged in a sacred moment" with her son.
  - [Video](#) with family
2. [ABC 15 Arizona](#): An article profiled the Tucson, Arizona Police Department's mental health support team which has become a "big role model for the nation" in cases involving the mentally ill or addicts. The article described the "compassionate" work of Tucson police officers responding to people in mental health crises and highlighted one officer who drove a woman in mental distress to the area's Crisis Response Center.
  - [Video](#)
3. [Dallas News](#): Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) praised Dallas police's new Rapid Integrated Group Healthcare Team (RIGHT) pilot program, which pairs counselors with officers to better respond to mental health calls. Cornyn said he wants the program to expand beyond southern Dallas and that it could be considered a model for city, state, and nationwide programs.
4. [ABC 9 KCRG](#): The American Civil Liberties Union praised the Johnson County, Iowa Sheriff's Office's new Jail Alternatives Program, which helps people with mental health or substance abuse issues get treatment instead of being incarcerated. Veronica Fowler, Communications Director for ACLU of Iowa, described the program as "smart" so that Iowa does not "end up with this mass incarceration problem."
5. [KGUN 9](#): An article highlighted Pima County, Arizona Sheriff's Office's efforts to reduce recidivism by emphasizing the mental health of inmates. Pima County is one of the first sheriff offices in the country to bring trained therapy dogs inside jail cells. Specially trained deputies are also assigned to check on former inmates to make sure they are taking their medication and seeing their doctors. Pima County Sheriff Mark Napier emphasized the challenges law enforcement in Arizona faces, claiming, "Jails have become unfortunately one of the largest mental health facilities in every county."



6. [Daily Record](#): An article highlighted the challenges Morris County, New Jersey Sheriff's Office faces with recidivism rates as high as 48% for inmates. The article also highlighted Morris County's Sheriff's Office new Successful Transition and Re-Entry (STAR) program, which aims to reduce recidivism by helping inmates access housing, food stamps, and Medicaid so they do not return to crime when they are released. Michael Lester, who signed up for STAR, shared his story and said STAR caseworkers enabled him to find an apartment and set up medical appointments.
7. [CNN](#): An article profiled Lori Stone, a woman who suffers from bi-polar disorder and who has been in and out of prison since she was 18 years-old. Stone described how every time she has been released from prison she has lost her disability benefits and Medicaid coverage, which means she cannot get treatment for her bi-polar disorder. Stone said the fact that she could not get treatment would lead her to do "something stupid like shoplifting to get alcohol," which would lead her to be reincarcerated.

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## Reliance On Law Enforcement For Mental Health Needs

8. [19 WHNT News](#): Morgan County, Alabama Sheriff Ron Puckett said many of the 600 inmates at the Morgan County Jail are "going through a mental health crisis" and said it is difficult for corrections officers to provide care since they are not trained therapists or psychologists. Puckett also mentioned inmates suffering from mental illness have put deputies in dangerous situations, including an incident that led to the hospitalization of a corrections officer.
9. [Farmington Daily Times](#): Farmington, New Mexico Police Chief Steve Hebbe described in an interview his concerns about the lack of mental health resources in New Mexico. A 2017 study found that New Mexico ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for spending on mental health resources, leading law enforcement to have to deal with many cases involving mental health. Officer Robert Decker also voiced concern about the lack of mental health resources in New Mexico, stating, "What we have is not enough to engage the number of people here who need help."



10. [WSAW 7](#): Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers has proposed expanding services to Wisconsin inmates with mental health needs through the Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (Oars) program in his latest budget proposal, to grow the program from 300 inmates currently treated to 525. Chippewa County, Wisconsin Sheriff Jim Kowalczyk said that he is seeing more mental health issues for his inmates today than he did more than a decade ago when he first became sheriff. Kowalczyk also said that the lack of mental health resources in Wisconsin has led inmates to eventually become reoffenders.

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