



## Behavioral Health Commissions and Task Forces

*State-Level Commissions, Task Forces and Work Groups provide a solid foundation for systemic change and improving responses to individuals with behavioral health needs. The Task Force recommends that Chief Justices and State Court Administrators ensure the state courts are “at the table.”*

Across the nation, state commissions have been formed to study the delivery of mental health services, including laws governing the provisions of mental health services, systems of emergency, short-term forensic and long-term mental health services, and to recommend systemic changes to state behavioral health and justice systems to improve access to treatment and services, the quality of treatment and services and outcomes for individuals in need of services. Oftentimes, state commissions are established in response to litigation; other times, as a proactive effort to examine necessary changes.

This Court Leadership Brief describes the various models of state commissions, the leadership, composition, structure, and organization, and whether it is established by order, proclamation, or statute. [Mental/Behavioral Health Commissions and Task Forces](#) describes each state’s commission, the creating entity, the website, the year started or ended if that information is available, and any special notes of interest. Please forward any updates or additions to this roster to [ptobias@ncsc.org](mailto:ptobias@ncsc.org).



### ARIZONA

The Arizona Supreme Court by Administrative Order established a [Committee on Mental Health and the Justice System](#) to address cases involving individuals with mental health issues which have posed challenges to the justice system, as well as to the person involved and their families. The Judiciary is in a unique position to bring community stakeholders together to develop solutions to improve the administration of justice for those with mental and behavioral healthcare needs. The Committee on Mental Health and the Justice System, established by [Administrative Order 2018-71](#), studied and made recommendations including identifying ways for the courts and other justice system stakeholders to effectively address how the justice system responds to persons in need of behavioral health services, oversee the development of a model guide to help presiding judges develop protocols to work with justice system-involved individuals with mental and behavioral healthcare needs, and coordinate statewide summits to share the guide and other resources with judges, court personnel, mental health professionals, and justice system stakeholders. The Final Report and Recommendations from October 2020 is available through [this link](#).

## CALIFORNIA

The California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye established the [Mental Health Issues Implementation Task Force](#) in January 2012 with a sunset date of December 31, 2015. The Mental Health Issues Implementation Task Force was charged with identifying the recommendations under Judicial Council purview and developed a plan for judicial branch and interbranch implementation activities to improve court, criminal justice and mental health services outcomes for adults and juvenile offenders with mental illness, ensure fair and expeditious administration of justice, and promote improved access to treatment for litigants in the justice system. The Task Force Final Report titled, *A Template for Changing the Paradigm for Persons with Mental Illness in the California Court System* is available through [this link](#).

## FLORIDA

The Florida Courts have a long history of appointing Task Forces on Substance Abuse and Mental Health in 2010 [Florida Supreme Court Administrative Order No. AOSC10-52 – Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Court](#) and again in 2016 [Florida Supreme Court Administrative Order No. AOSC16-44 – Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Court](#). A detailed report and recommendations to transform the mental health system in Florida was developed which included recommendations and strategies for planning, leadership, financing, and services. [Transforming Florida's Mental Health System](#) outlines those strategies. More recently, [AOSC18-32: Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts](#) was appointed by Chief Justice Charles Canady to be chaired by Judge Steven Leifman. [AOSC20-79](#) includes the full list of members through 2022.

## IDAHO

The three branches of Idaho State Government together supported the establishment of the [Idaho Behavioral Health Council \(IBHC\)](#). Dave Jeppesen, Director of the Department of Health and Welfare, and Sara Omundson, Administrative Director of the Courts serve as co-chairs. The IBHC Vision is that *"adults, children, and their families who live with mental illness and addiction receive the behavioral health care services they need when they need them. We believe if this vision is realized, then people in Idaho will have a better quality of life, reduced risk of involvement with the criminal justice system, and make our communities healthier, safer places to live."* The IBHC developed and adopted an approved [Strategic Action Plan](#) in 2021.

## ILLINOIS

In 2019, the State Justice Institute (SJI) funded a three-year project called the National Initiative to Improve the Justice System Response to Mental Illness and Co-Occurring Disorders (National Initiative). As part of that National Initiative, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators hosted a Midwest Regional Summit in October 2019 in Deadwood, South Dakota. The respective Midwest Chief Justices and State Court Administrators appointed multi-disciplinary teams to attend the Midwest Summit, which combined educational sessions with opportunities for state teams to identify opportunities for improvement and set priorities. Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Anne M. Burke and Illinois State Court Administrator Marcia Meis assembled and led an Illinois delegation at the

Summit. Upon returning to Illinois, under direction of the Illinois Supreme Court, the interdisciplinary, multi-branch group of leaders formed the Illinois Mental Health Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force immediately began working to accomplish the priorities identified at the Midwest Regional Summit by the Illinois delegation including the planning of an Illinois Mental Health Summit (Summit). The [Virtual Summit, Improving the Court and Community Response to Persons with Mental Illness and Co-Occurring Disorders through Compassion and Hope](#), convened by Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Anne M. Burke, consisted of six sessions held from September through December of 2020. Currently, the Task Force operates with intent to further the efforts supported by all who planned, presented, and attended the Summit.

With technical assistance from the National Center for State Courts, the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts' Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator facilitates the Supreme Court's efforts through the redefined Illinois Supreme Court Task Force on Improving the Court and Community Response to Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorders. Court Professionals, Treatment/Health & Human Service Providers, Legislators, State Departments, and University Officials from throughout Illinois participate on the Task Force with a common goal of effectuating the following recommendations from the Summit: 1) building a community-by-community approach, supported by statewide leadership from all three branches of government; 2) conducting a statewide mapping or needs assessment to identify what is working and what gaps exist; 3) creating a vision for Illinois' mental health continuum of care; 4) developing and implementing a statewide strategic plan; and 5) ensuring accountability through transparency and accessible reports on Task Force activities.

## INDIANA

The 20-member [Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council](#) consists of leadership from both the executive and judicial branches of state and local government. The Advisory Council is charged with conducting state-level reviews of local corrections programs, county jails and probation services, and the processes used by the Department of Correction and the Division of Mental Health and Addiction in awarding grants. Recent legislation established a local Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council (Local JRAC) in each county [\[IC 33-38-9.5-4\]](#). Local JRACs are required to promote the use of evidence-based and best practices in the areas of community-based sentencing alternatives and recidivism reduction; review, evaluate, and make recommendations about local practices (community-based corrections and jail overcrowding); compile reports as directed by the State JRAC; and communicate with the State JRAC to establish and implement best practices and to ensure consistent collection and reporting of data.

Indiana's parallel State and Local Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council (JRAC) statutes provide a procedural vehicle through which to coordinate state and local court reform efforts generally. Implementation of the work of The National Judicial Task Force provides a specific example of this coordination. NCSC, in conjunction with State JRAC, provided mapping of the State's Behavioral Health Continuum of Care, using the Sequential Intercept Model. In the coming months, each Local JRAC will conduct its own mapping. State JRAC will provide general technical assistance to all Local JRACs through a series of webinars and a dedicated website. Additional technical assistance will be provided

to Local JRACs, as needed, via direct communication between a Local JRAC point of contact and a State JRAC multi-disciplinary response team. The coordinated mapping exercise will culminate in a Statewide Behavioral Health Summit in 2022, co-hosted by the Indiana Supreme Court and the Association of Indiana Counties (as statutory members of State JRAC) and attended by multi-disciplinary teams from all ninety-two counties (statutory members of each Local JRAC).

## NEW JERSEY

In 2019 Chief Justice Stuart Rabner formed the [Statewide Supreme Court Mental Health Advisory Committee](#) to continue New Jersey's ongoing work in addressing system-wide issues involving individuals with mental illness. The Committee is a multi-disciplinary collaborative effort involving criminal justice and behavioral health stakeholders to breakdown silos and improve the ways in which we respond to some of the most vulnerable individuals who come in contact with the courts. New Jersey Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman and New Jersey Morris/Sussex Vicinage Assignment Judge Stuart Minkowitz serve as co-chairs of the Committee. The Committee is comprised of leaders including Judges and Judiciary staff, representatives from the Office of Attorney General, the Office of the Public Defender, the Legislature, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health, county mental health administrators, mental health advocacy groups, and other stakeholders. The Committee's initial focus is on justice-involved individuals facing criminal charges. Through a collaborative effort, the Committee is developing a framework for a Pilot program to: (1) better identify individuals with mental illness in the jail with continuous coordination and warm handoffs upon pretrial release; (2) facilitate linkages to community-based services, mental health evaluations and mental health treatment as early as possible while the person is on pretrial monitoring; (3) determine opportunities for admission into a diversion program and potential dismissals or downgrades of criminal charges; and (4) identify strategies for establishing a sustainable model that could be implemented across the state. The Judiciary has established pilot project sites for a mental health collaborative integrated with the courts, prosecutors, public defenders, community-based services, and behavioral health providers that will begin in 2021. The New Jersey Department of Human Services is incorporating budgetary funding for developing certain aspects of a pilot program. Data and analytics will serve to measure success, gaps, areas for improvement, and sustainability. Additionally, the Administrative Director of the Courts has formed a partnership with the [Northeast & Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center \(MHTTC\)](#) for stakeholder training for the pilot sites. The Advisory Committee will also identify and formalize best practices to further the goal of better serving those with mental illness who interact with the justice system. The Committee's work builds upon prior Judiciary committees to address the needs of individuals with mental illness [Interbranch Advisory Committee on Mental Health Initiatives \(njcourts.gov\) 2012](#).

## OHIO

Attorney General Dave Yost established the [Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Illness](#) co-chaired by Attorney General Yost and Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, retired. The Task Force recognized that a significant number of individuals with mental illness are involved in the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems. As a result, these systems have become de facto mental health providers of psychological and psychiatric services to these individuals. Often, individuals with mental illness cycle in and out of the criminal justice system due to gaps found in the community mental health system. To address this revolving door effect, former Attorney General Mike DeWine, and Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, Retired, formed the Attorney General's Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Illness in 2011. The Task Force evolved from the Advisory Committee on Mental Illness and the Courts (ACMIC), which Justice Stratton started in 2001. The Task Force is composed of state agency representatives, law enforcement, judges and mental health professionals who meet regularly to increase public safety and reduce the number of persons with mental illness trapped in the criminal justice system.

## TEXAS

The [Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health](#) was created by a joint order of the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The mission of the Commission is to engage and empower court systems through collaboration, education, and leadership, thereby improving the lives of individuals with mental health needs and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Commission oversees an annual Mental Health Summit and other campaigns to improve services. Most recently the Commission adopted a Texas Action Plan for rightsizing competency restoration services called [Eliminate the Wait](#).



**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** regarding other potential strategies for Leading Change in your state, see the [Leading Change Guide](#).

[www.ncsc.org/behavioralhealth](http://www.ncsc.org/behavioralhealth)



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