

Interview with Marcia M. Meis

Director, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts

NATIONAL JUDICIAL TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE STATE COURTS' RESPONSE TO MENTAL ILLNESS

Marcia Meis discusses the Task Force's work and goals.

In the seventh of eight interviews of the National Judicial Task Force Executive Committee members, Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts Marcia M. Meis, Co-chair of the Education, Partnerships & Implementation Work Group, discusses how the Task Force's work will lead to real change, what she hopes the Work Group will accomplish, and what challenges Illinois is facing.

Q: How can we ensure that the task force's work leads to real change?

A: The key to real change will be modeling and encouraging cross-sector and intragovernmental collaboration at the national, state, and local level. Although the National Task Force will sunset later in 2022, the work will go on. With the support and continued leadership of the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, we must continue to promote development of state and local commissions and task forces while advocating for policy and resources that enable state and local action. Ongoing encouragement and commitment at the national level demonstrates to state and local leaders that improving the court and community response to individuals with mental illness and co-occurring disorders is an ongoing priority and change is the expectation.

Q: What do you hope the Education, Partnerships & Implementation Work Group accomplishes?

A: I am proud of the Education, Partnerships & Implementation Work Group's accomplishments to date and the tremendous resources the Work Group has already made available through the expertise of our energetic and committed members. I look forward to what's yet to come and I know we will meet our goals through the good fortune of having the support of NCSC, specifically Principal Court Management Consultant Patti Tobias and the Task Force team, to keep us on task and on target. We have established a roadmap for states through the development of resources such as the Leading Change Guides and Leadership Briefs. We are continuously plotting the course to change through strengthening partnerships with the Judges and Psychiatric Leadership Initiative and other national groups, as well as strengthening our relationship with leaders in all SAMHSA regions. My hope, and I have no doubt that it will turn to action, is for partnerships such as these to continue paving the road at the intersection of behavioral health and the justice system.

Q: What's the situation in your state as it relates to the needs of individuals with serious mental illness who find themselves in the courts?

A: As we are all aware, the prevalence of mental illness and co-occurring disorders continues to greatly impact our courts and justice system nationally, but I am pleased to say that, while there is still a great deal of work to be done, Illinois has made significant progress. From the development of a statewide task force devoted to mental health, hosting a state summit series in late Fall 2020, and the Illinois Supreme Court's approval of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts' hire of its first-ever Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator, our courts have invested considerable time and resources building the foundation for change. We have a lofty goal of creating a statewide vision for what a comprehensive behavioral health continuum of care, with multiple diversion pathways, could and should look like. We continuously work toward realization of that vision with ongoing support from the State Justice Institute and Department of Justice grants – for which we are most grateful – allowing for consultation with experts from the NCSC and making this vision a reality.

