



Trauma-Informed Practices and Jurors

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

The National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness recognizes that "hearing stories of violence and listening to difficult testimonies are recurring and persistent experiences for judicial officers and practitioners working in the justice system."¹ While many state courts have struggled with providing support to jurors who have listened to difficult testimony, the Executive Office of the Massachusetts Trial Court in partnership with the state Office of Jury Commissioner has done something about it! This innovation spotlight describes the Massachusetts approach and provides resources for other courts and jury commissions to consider.

Getting Started

Former Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Trial Court Paula Carey and Court Administrator John Bello recognized that some jurors were troubled by their experience after the conclusion of the trial and would benefit from short-term counseling services. The Executive Office of the Massachusetts Trial Court (Office) wanted to provide the option of confidential, short-term counseling for jurors at no cost.

First, the Office looked to the state vendor for their Employee Assistance Program (EAP.) However, the vendor would not allow jurors to participate in its plan, as jurors are not considered employees. Undeterred, the Office used a state contract to solicit mental healthcare vendors to provide mental health services for jurors that may need support after serving on a jury. Vendors were required to provide confidential, one-on-one, non-therapeutic consultation services.

The Office contracted with a provider in 2021 and worked with the provider to develop protocols, dashboard reporting, and procedures for notifying jurors of the availability of services after the conclusion of their service.

Jurors who request assistance are provided with expert behavioral health and trauma support, in the form of clinician-led, non-therapeutic, one-on-one counseling sessions. Sessions are offered via a virtual platform, telephonically, or in person. Each juror is provided with up to three (3) sessions. If additional support is requested or warranted, outside resources will be suggested by the vendor.

¹ [Court Leadership Brief Secondary Trauma and the Courts](#)

Next Steps

Juror cancellations and restrictions on jury trials due to COVID-19 have impeded the ability of the Office to truly evaluate the level of service this program can provide Massachusetts trial jurors. However, the Office intends to continue its efforts with this vital program and to support its jurors. Data will be collected to ensure the efficacy of the project.

Contact for Additional Information

Pamela J. Wood
Jury Commissioner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Jury Commissioner
pamela.wood@jud.state.ma.us
617-422-5860

Susan Lawlor
Program Manager
Executive Office of the Massachusetts Trial Court
susan.lawlor@jud.state.ma.us
617-878-0430

Resources

Maricopa County Juror Brochure Tips for Coping After Jury Duty, https://www.ncsc-jurystudies.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/7644/jury-trial-innovations-2d-ed-2006.pdf, Appendix 6, pdf pp.215-218.

Jury News column by Paula Hannaford Agor, https://www.ncsc-jurystudies.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/7891/a-new-option-for-addressing-juror-stress.pdf.

Federal Court juror assistance program through Federal EAP, <https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2020/01/24/how-courts-care-jurors-high-profile-cases>.

Contact for more info: Ed Juel, 202-502-1434

[Secondary Trauma and the Courts](#)

[Trauma and Trauma-Informed Responses](#)

