

2017 Nomination for the Eastern Region CJAB Best Practices Award – Philadelphia

I nominate the Philadelphia Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) for the 2017 CJAB Best Practices Award to be awarded by the County Commissioner's Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP). The Philadelphia CJAB finds its strength in its collaborative spirit among members, its strong leadership team and its support for the creation and ongoing success of innovative programming.

The Philadelphia CJAB formed in 2008. At the time, the concept was not well-received with all prospective members, but over time the group was able to work through those issues. Today, membership has expanded to include county and city leadership, ample representation from the courts, various community groups and key criminal justice stakeholders, all who attend or send representatives to most meetings. The group's bi-monthly discussions are lively and productive and there is a sense of overall collaboration and cooperation among departments. This is remarkable due to the fact that Philadelphia, one of two Commonwealth first class counties, has a unique, two-court system structure. In such a large jurisdiction, one would not expect to find the level of congeniality and a willingness to work to solve the city's serious criminal justice issues that exists here. Several members of the Philadelphia CJAB are actively involved in and critical to important statewide initiatives, including CJAB Chair President Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper, City Councilman Curtis Jones and Chief Public Defender Keir Bradford-Grey, among others.

As a result of a strategic planning process, by-laws were recently updated to follow minimum standards with the inclusion of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP), an important member in recent Philadelphia discussions. Last month, the group discussed the possibility of a "turn-in" program where absconding offenders can turn themselves in and seek resolution of their charges. Initially it began as a PBPP initiative, but after discussion it was determined that CJAB members would work collaboratively with PBPP to create a program not just for state offenders but those who had absconded from the local and federal criminal justice systems as well.

The Philadelphia CJAB has been successful in creating and/or supporting large city criminal justice initiatives including several problem-solving courts, diversion programs and re-entry support for returning citizens. In 2015, the City and its CJAB partners were awarded a \$3.5 million grant from the MacArthur Foundation to examine the justice system as a whole and develop strategies that focus on reducing the jail population and racial/ethnic disparities while preserving public safety. Philadelphia has a robust and active re-entry coalition, created and supported by CJAB members with engagement by community and faith-based organizations poised to assist people returning to the community from prison. The Honorable Marsha Neifield and the DA's office, along with other partners, were instrumental in creating unique diversity programs, such as "The Choice Is Yours" in which young drug dealers with no assessed addiction issues are diverted into work programs in order to gain sustainable, legal employment and an opportunity to work off their charges.

Philadelphia CJAB members have obtained grants to improve technology, communication and efficiency of its member agencies. One grant project enabled the city to convert to the parole petition process from paper to electronic, something that was in place until just recently. The paper process costs the city in excess of \$1 million over the course of a year due to the necessity of having couriers deliver the documents from one agency to the next

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for signatures, resulting in far more days spent in jail for offenders who were awaiting a parole release.

There are many grant and county/city funded projects that have been created in Philadelphia. At the heart of many of these projects is its dedicated CJAB. This group has helped to enable Philadelphia's criminal justice system to go from antiquated practices to cutting edge technology and innovative programming, resulting in a reduction of the jail population and increase in public safety. Its neighborhoods and communities can find solace in the fact that this large metropolitan area with serious crime issues is under constant vigilance by a group of dedicated, collaborative criminal justice stakeholders through its CJAB.

As a result, Staff respectfully recommends the Philadelphia Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2017 CJAB Best Practices Award.