

2017 Nomination for the Western Region CJAB Best Practices Award – Allegheny County

The Allegheny County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) was established in 2002 by President Judge Robert A. Kelly and the first Allegheny County Chief Executive, James C. Roddey. The newly formed CJAB, one of first in Pennsylvania, was comprised of 21 key stakeholders throughout the criminal justice system, State Government, Victims Services, and Public Health Sector. The Board members were charged with providing the coordinated leadership necessary to establish cohesive public policies and programs utilizing research and evaluation, systemic planning, and collaborative implementation.

Through the work of Allegheny County CJAB's network of members, committees, and community partnerships, including that of the Allegheny Jail Collaborative, the last decade has given rise to system-wide innovation. Once facing the prospect of building a second new prison in under a decade, the CJAB and its partners have worked tirelessly to study their offender population and conduct extensive case reviews to identify gaps in service and reign in jail overcrowding. From the outset, the group has sought outside experts such as the Institute for Law and Policy Planning, the Urban Institute, the National Institute of Corrections, and many others to conduct independent reviews on the criminal justice system and local programming, leading to wide scale justice system reinvestment.

Utilizing the aforementioned studies to inform their strategic planning process, the CJAB membership and their local partners have worked to overhaul their booking and identification process, including alterations to warrant processing. They've streamlined their arrest procedures, through the establishment of a standardized arrest program, allowing law enforcement to submit criminal complaints electronically, which now kicks off a host of actions including booking and evaluation by the County's nationally recognized pre-trial service program, which in turn provides the Court with accurate and timely information regarding bond, competency, and treatment needs for informed decision making. The CJAB has also worked closely with the Court System to improve upon case flow; altering arraignments, and establishing early disposition programming to expedite preliminary hearings and plea agreements. Adjustments were made to their failure to appear process, and an expansive array of Problem Solving Court tracks have been instituted, including Drug, Driving under the Influence, Mental Health, Veterans, Domestic Violence, Sexual Offender, and Prostitution Court.

Working in conjunction with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Jail Collaborative, the CJAB focused their efforts to reduce incarceration at both the front and back end of the criminal justice system, simultaneously. By 2006, Allegheny County adopted the Sequential Intercept Model as its guide to developing a comprehensive continuum of justice-related services and supports, building upon an already widely recognized Justice Related Services program. In 2007, they found that an inordinate number of people with mental illnesses were incarcerated in the Allegheny County Jail. In an effort to address the unique needs of these individuals, Allegheny County CJAB and Jail Collaborative members partnered to identify those arrested for minor crimes, and divert them from incarceration. However, despite successes with programs like Mental Health Court, it became clear that identification and intervention should occur prior to arrest. This led to the design of one of Pennsylvania's first Crisis Intervention Team Training (CIT) Programs. The new Team was charged with de-escalating, assessing, and referring nonviolent individuals with mental illnesses to the appropriate treatment services.

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In 2009 the CJAB opened their first Day Reporting Center (DRC), a unique approach to community-based supervision, promoting public safety and positive lifestyle changes in offenders. These DRCs, now located throughout the County, engage offenders through referral, risk assessment, individualized goal planning, and structured supervision. Offenders on probation, parole, electronic monitoring and pretrial supervision are referred to the DRCs for monitoring and access to a multitude of in-house services including: Drug and Alcohol Evaluations, Anger Management, Life Skills, General Education Development (GED) preparation, Job Readiness and Job Search as well as various community service projects.

Now under the leadership of CJAB Co-Chairs, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, and President Judge Jeffrey A. Manning, the CJAB is committed to providing the leadership and means necessary to establish policy and programming that both meet and anticipate the needs of public safety. The CJAB has continued to build upon their early successes, with ever increasing collaborations. With over 44 members, they have long outgrown their former home in the President Judge's Conference Room, moving instead to the Court's new Judicial Training Center. Recognizing the collaborative spirit and cohesive environment fostered by breaking bread together, the CJAB continues to meet over lunch, often prepared by organizations that hire returning citizens, many of whom participated in education, job readiness programs, and transition planning through the County's new reentry programming.

Although the County, Courts, City of Pittsburgh, and their many partners have been on the forefront of innovation in technology, data sharing, public health and community safety, they're not ready to throw in the terrible towel just yet. The leadership in the Steel City is looking to modernize programming by integrating reentry and community-based services through co-location, thereby reaching and serving many more high-risk offenders. They're also working to provide key stakeholders with timely access to data through the establishment of dashboards to monitor key points in the criminal justice system, which will allow them to assess various aspects of the criminal justice system while improving upon daily operating processes. Last, but certainly not least, the CJAB and their Facilitator, John Rago, have embraced a conviction integrity initiative as part of its inherent mission to sustain and grow public confidence in the County's criminal justice system. They've worked to identify opportunities to support law enforcement, including a push to standardize law enforcement training, evidence management and preservation practices. They've also continued to work with Senator Greenleaf on Senate Bill 976 to provide recommendations for body worn cameras, electronic recording of interrogations and changes in Pennsylvania's Right to Know laws.

The Allegheny County CJAB and its partners continually embrace new and innovative concepts, modernizing the face of the criminal justice system, while serving as a model for counties throughout the Commonwealth and across the nation. Over the last two decades, their collaborative spirit has continued to grow and foster new relationships and innovations. This is become more evident with the formation of lasting partnerships, as well as the cohesiveness of the law enforcement, courts, corrections, public health and safety initiatives outlined in the CJAB's 2016-2017 strategic plan. Staff respectfully recommends the Allegheny County Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2017 CJAB Best Practices Award.