

Addressing Needs of Women in the Criminal Justice System

Two New Grant Awards Awarded to Dutchess County and Project More

Poughkeepsie...Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro is pleased to announce two recent grant awards to address the needs of female offenders, one of the key objectives outlined in the Criminal Justice System Needs Assessment report issued in 2012 by the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council (CJC). The Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections has been awarded one of two national grants from the National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women for training and technical assistance to implement gender-responsive approaches to pretrial screening and services. Project More, a community agency that Dutchess County Government contracts with to provide its transitional housing program, has been awarded a new Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) grant totaling \$450,000 from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and will work in partnership with the Office of Probation and Community Corrections to implement a Women's Reporting Center that will provide evidence based case management and other services for female offenders in Dutchess County.



County Executive Molinaro stated, "Dutchess County has among the most robust Alternatives to Incarceration programming offerings in New York State, but we continue to improve and address specific needs to improve our criminal justice system as part of our two pronged approach to ending the long standing and costly policy of housing out inmates in other county facilities. These two new grant awards enable us to develop specific programming to address the needs of female inmates."

Studies have found women are typically lower risk for re-offense than men, but have greater level of need since they suffer at higher rates of mental health, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders; have greater parenting and childcare responsibilities and suffer from higher rates of trauma (due to sexual abuse and assault, domestic violence, etc.). In Dutchess County, female offenders are further challenged by the need to be "housed out" in other county facilities due to lack of capacity at the Dutchess County Jail.

Dutchess County houses out more female inmates than any other county in NYS, accounting for approximately 25% of the total number of female inmates housed out statewide. Housing out creates issues such as isolation from family visits and difficulties having medications "follow" them from one correctional facility to other. The issue of housing out is also an expensive one, costing taxpayers more

than \$8 million per year and growing.

Identifying specific needs of female offenders during the pretrial process provides the opportunity to target specific services and case management to address those needs for maximum overall benefit to both the offender and the criminal justice system. Pretrial practices include identifying those who can be safely released pretrial based on risk assessment and providing supervision practices, including specialized services based on needs, that are most likely to assure appearance in court while reducing the likelihood of new offenses by the released defendant.

With the technical assistance grant from the National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women (NRJCIW), Dutchess County will serve as a pilot location to research and implement new pretrial screening and services for women that will serve as best practices nationwide. NRCJIW is working with Dutchess County Government, examining the County's current pretrial practices specific to women and will seek to pilot change strategies that address identified gaps, building on existing research and practices tailored to women. The information and experience learned in Dutchess County will be used to produce resources to assist other agencies nationwide who are interested in implementing gender-informed policies and practices at the pretrial stage.

Director of Probation and Community Corrections and Chair of the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council Mary Ellen Still noted, "Program development to address the needs of female offenders was one of the stated objectives in the CJC's Needs Assessment Report. If we can develop better strategies to address the unique needs of women during the pretrial process, we can reduce the likelihood for recidivism as well as reduce the total number of incarcerated females, particularly those who must be housed out of county in other correctional facilities."

Project More, which currently operates Dutchess County's Transitional Housing program, has been awarded an 18 month, \$450,000 DCJS grant (with two optional one-year renewals) to develop a Women's Reporting Center, providing evidence based case management, cognitive behavioral intervention, employment development programming, temporary housing and other services to female offenders as an alternative to incarceration.

Grant applicants were required to demonstrate strong working relations with local criminal justice agencies and are expected to use state-approved, validated risk and needs assessment to identify criminogenic needs, develop case plans and match individuals with services to meet their specific needs. Project More is partnering with Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections, which uses the COMPAS risk and needs assessment tool and will provide referrals to Project More. Dutchess County Probation already has established gender specific caseloads, recognizing that female offenders respond positively to an approach designed uniquely for them. Project More's Women Reporting Center ATI program is a natural extension to this concept, enhancing collaboration and compatibility.

Project More's Director of Programming Martin Lynch said, "Addressing the needs of female offenders is paramount to reducing the risk of recidivism and the necessity for confinement. The Women's Reporting Center is a model Alternative to Incarceration program that addresses a very specific need within Dutchess County's criminal justice system. We are thrilled to partner with Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections, the Courts and the Dutchess County Jail in the referral process and case

collaboration that will support the successful placement of women back into the community.”

The Dutchess County Women’s Reporting Center is expected to be operating by the end of January. Mary Haight will serve as the Director of the Women’s Reporting Center.

County Executive Molinaro concluded, “Dutchess County continues to be aggressive in its efforts to pursue grant opportunities that provide solutions, without adding to the tax burden, and we are grateful to our community partners including Project More for working together with us to improve the overall criminal justice system for our community.”

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