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**DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION LAUNCHES \$130 MILLION PLAN TO REDUCE CRIME,
REDUCE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES BEHIND
BARS**

Comprehensive approach will transform how those with behavioral illnesses are treated at every stage of the criminal justice system

\$130 million investment—of which \$40 million is asset forfeiture funds contributed by the District Attorney of Manhattan—will fund dozens of strategies

Read the full Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System [Action Plan](#)

NEW YORK—The de Blasio administration today released the report of the Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System, a comprehensive roadmap to continue to drive down crime while also reducing the number of people with behavioral health issues needlessly cycling through the criminal justice system.

This unprecedented, \$130 million, four-year investment is a key component of the de Blasio administration's ongoing efforts to reduce unnecessary arrests and incarceration, direct criminal justice resources to where they will have the greatest public safety impact, and make the system fairer. The Manhattan District Attorney contributed \$40 million to this effort, with the remaining \$90 million coming from City funds.

"For years, the criminal justice system has been the default for dealing with behavioral and mental health issues, but that approach alone does not best serve public health or public safety," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "This comprehensive plan to identify and divert individuals out of the criminal justice system and connect them with treatment and services to address their underlying issues will mean not only safer streets, but stronger neighborhoods and healthier people."

"For far too many New Yorkers with mental health and substance use disorders, the criminal justice system is a maze they can never escape," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "The City has made a real commitment to addressing the root causes of this urgent problem."

"Law enforcement and criminal justice professionals have long agreed that addressing the specific needs of defendants with behavioral health issues is of critical importance," said **Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.** "Despite this acknowledgment, a lack of effective solutions has persisted for decades, leading to high recidivism rates and an overall system that is unfair for those afflicted. Using asset forfeiture funds secured by my office, this action plan creates an ambitious and achievable path forward."

Over the last 20 years, New York City has experienced the sharpest drops in crime anywhere in the nation, while also substantially reducing jail populations. Despite this success, individuals with behavioral health issues constitute a bigger and bigger percentage of the total number incarcerated. On any given day in New York City jails, approximately 7 percent of those detained suffer from serious mental illness, 38 percent from a broader array of mental issues, and more than 85 percent have substance use disorders. Many justice-involved individuals with behavioral health needs cycle through the system over and over again, often for low-level offenses. For example, a group of approximately 400 individuals has been admitted to jail more than 18 times in the last five years. This same group accounted for more than 10,000 jail admissions and a collective 300,000 days in jail during this period.

The Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System spent 100 days developing dozens of interlocking public health and public safety strategies that address each point in the criminal justice system and the overlap among those points. The recommendations of the task force focus on ensuring that, when appropriate, individuals with behavioral health disorders: do not enter the criminal justice system in the first place; if they do enter, that they are treated outside of a jail setting; if they are in jail, that they receive treatment that is therapeutic, rather than punitive; and that upon release, they are connected to effective services.

Signature initiatives of the Action Plan include:

- **Before Arrest: Expand training for police officers and encourage diversion to services, instead of arrest, for people who do not pose a public safety threat.** The City will expand training for police officers that will enable them to better recognize the behaviors and symptoms of mental illness and substance use. This new training module will ultimately be integrated into the police academy curriculum, and in the short term, will be stand-alone 36 hour training for 5,500 officers in two target areas.

The City will also pilot a clinical drop-off center in Manhattan to provide an option for individuals who need neither to be held for arraignment on low-level charges nor emergency room services. This drop-off center will provide the police with a much needed alternative to jail for persons with mental health issues. A second drop-off center will open in another borough in early 2016.

- **At Arraignment: Expand supervised release, develop risk assessment tool, pursue bail reform strategies, and reduce case processing times.** The City will add 2,300 slots to existing supervised release programs for adults and pilot a new, science-based risk assessment tool for judges and service providers that accurately identifies and diverts people who do not pose a high risk of re-offending or flight and can therefore be safely supervised in the community, continuing to work and meet other commitments while waiting for trial.

The City will begin efforts to improve its bail system to reduce reliance monetary bail as a surrogate measure of risk by developing a scientifically-validated risk tool that judges can factor into their release decisions, similar to what has been done effectively in other jurisdictions.

- **Incarceration: Expand access to effective treatment in jail.** Among other initiatives, the City will improve officer and inmate safety by deploying Crisis Intervention Teams composed of corrections and health workers to deescalate incidents; reduce punitive segregation; develop a strategy to expand access to substance use disorder treatments; and create specialized units to provide preventative services to inmates with behavioral health issues.

- **Release and Re-entry: Expanded re-entry services and supportive housing to set people up to never return to jail.** Among other initiatives, the City will provide in-jail discharge planning teams to connect people to Medicaid, the Human Resources Administration, Health Homes and other available programs and services, as well as create 267 supportive, permanent housing slots through the Department of Homeless Services to reduce emergency room, shelter, and jail use.

Recognizing the foundational importance of housing in stabilizing the lives and improving treatment of people with behavioral health issues, the City will also establish a housing planning team that will focus on providing additional access to supportive, affordable and public housing for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health issues.

These strategies will be jointly implemented by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the New York Police Department, the Department of Correction, the Department of Probation, the District Attorneys, the Courts, the Administration of Children’s Services, and non-profit groups, among others. Mayor de Blasio launched the Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System in June 2014 to develop a strategic, actionable plan to transform the city’s criminal justice system to one that reliably assesses who poses a public safety risk and ensures that the system appropriately addresses—not just at arrest, but well before and well after—the behavioral health issues that have led many into contact with the criminal justice system.

“For many with behavioral health needs, the criminal justice system is a revolving door leading to multiple costly, short stays behind bars over the course of their adult lives,” said **Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services**. “Given that the underlying charges are mostly low-level offenses, we need to question whether traditional criminal justice resources are best deployed when dealing with this population.”

“We know that many of the issues that ultimately end in time behind bars start well before and last well after contact with the criminal justice system, and implicate many more players than the jail system alone. This is particularly true for people with behavioral health issues,” said **Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice**. “Improving public health and safety outcomes requires looking at the entire system and implementing the smartest, most effective strategies across the board.”

“NYPD often finds itself to be an agency of last resort in dealing with various issues involving individuals with mental health and substance abuse problems. We welcome the opportunity to work more closely with our partners in the fields of criminal justice and mental health, as well as other social service providers, in seeking alternative solutions for more effectively addressing these issues,” said **Police Commissioner William J. Bratton**.

“Few correction professionals entered this field expecting to care for so many mentally ill inmates. By emphasizing the need for therapeutic treatment and Crisis Intervention Teams that include mental health workers, by expanding access to substance use disorder treatments, and by supporting specialized units for inmates who are mentally ill, the Task Force recommendations will help DOC staff adapt to this reality and bring meaningful reform to Rikers Island,” said **Department of Correction Commissioner Joe Ponte**.

“The Health Department is responsible for providing general medical and mental health services in the City’s jails, and we are proud to begin implementing strategies at the intersection of public health and public safety,” said **Mary Bassett, MD, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**. “The recommendations of the task force draw on strong evidence-driven models from around the country to better ensure the well-being of people from an initial encounter with police to arraignment, incarceration and release home, often to communities with the highest disease burdens in the City.”

“Catalyzed by the tragic death of a veteran, this timely report by the Mayor’s task force informs the City’s strategy going forward by adopting a cross-disciplinary systems approach that incorporates peer and staff stabilization training and coordinated networks of care, services and resources to achieve better outcomes within the criminal justice system,” said **Loree Sutton, MD, Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.) and Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Veterans’ Affairs**. “As importantly, this model paves the way for building capacity within communities to strengthen resilience and prevent criminal activity, thus maximizing public health and safety for all.”

“The Mayor’s latest initiative to reduce crimes and address the serious problem of mental health is a double winner,” said **Congressman Charles Rangel**. “I applaud his visionary leadership in developing more efficient and innovative ways to make New York City always ahead of the curve and one of the best cities to live in America. This comprehensive approach to improving our criminal justice system will go a long way to reducing incarceration rates and protecting our constituents from unnecessary harm.”

“Directing non-violent, low-level offenders with mental health problems into treatment, rather than jail, is an important step. Mental health services will reach those who need them most, and public safety will improve as these New Yorkers come off the streets and get into treatment. New York is already the safest big city in the country. These steps will make it even safer even as they make the system more fair for those suffering from mental health issues,” said **Congressman Elliot Engel**.

“Far too often, people with mental disorders end up cycling through a criminal justice system that fails to take in consideration their particular needs and doesn’t offer them access to the treatment they need. Our City’s jail system has become the de facto method to deal with behavioral and mental health patients when they really need a specialized treatment and public health approach. Mayor de Blasio’s comprehensive plan will allow the criminal justice system, police officers, jails, and public health officers to better serve and treat this population to reduce the number of mental health patients in our jails,” said **Congressman José E. Serrano**.

“The report of the Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System that recommended a shift from punitive sentences to therapeutic and rehabilitative services is a welcome departure from the decades-old practice of using the criminal justice system to institutionalize people with mental issues. By diverting those with mental disorders away from jail and instead providing them with behavioral treatment, New York City will be a leading example in criminal justice reform. It will lead to a better, more fulfilling life for many New Yorkers and will strengthen our neighborhoods and families. I commend Mayor de Blasio and the Task Force for their efforts, along with the Manhattan District Attorney’s office for its dedication of funds,” said **Congressman Gregory Meeks**.

“We have known for a long time that incarceration is not the most effective method of dealing with members of our community that struggle with behavioral health issues. Restructuring our City’s criminal justice system to help identify people facing behavioral health issues that encounter the law and investing in providing those individuals with the appropriate resources to help them address and manage their health will go a long way in reducing needless arrest, improving the safety in our communities, and improving the health of countless New Yorkers,” said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera**. “I thank Mayor de Blasio for working to make our criminal justice system more effective and fairer for all New Yorkers.”

“Mayor de Blasio’s initiative establishes a more compassionate and thoughtful policy intended to save the lives of New York’s emotionally disturbed persons, and bridge the chasm between those in emotional crisis and law enforcement. NYPD officers will receive specialized training enabling them to respond to calls involving emotionally disturbed persons in a manner that will increase the safety of the citizens, and that of the police officer and bystanders. This vitally important step will break the cycle of escalation in which people who are sick and in crisis are treated like dangerous criminals instead of receiving the help they need,” said **State Senator Kevin Parker**.

“Harrowing stories of insufficient treatment abounded at the Assembly hearing I held on mental health in the correctional system last month,” said **Assembly Member Daniel O’Donnell, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Correction**. “We must provide individuals with the services they need to be healthy and stay out of the criminal justice system. These new efforts by the City are clearly a vital step in that direction. Mentally ill individuals need continuous treatment, not continuous punishment.”

“Rikers Island has become the mental health institution of last resort in New York City. This plan will go a long way in addressing the issues facing our criminal justice system by increasing diversion to services, ensuring safety by expanding supervised release programs, and augmenting re-entry services to allow for an effective transition back into society,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health**. “These reforms—once implemented—will positively impact how individuals with behavioral illnesses are dealt with throughout the criminal justice system.”

“I applaud the de Blasio administration for understanding that addressing the mental health needs of New York’s inmate population is an important part of improving public safety,” said **Council Member Elizabeth Crowley, Chair of the Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee**. “These proactive reforms will reduce recidivism and save taxpayer dollars by providing those entering the criminal justice system with the right mental health and substance abuse services. I look forward to working with Commissioner Ponte to ensure that these reforms are effective in curbing violence and ending business as usual on Rikers Island.”

“The City has made incredible strides in reducing crime in the past few decades,” said **Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair of the Health Committee**. “However, there is much work to be done. Given the significant number of people suffering from behavioral health issues in New York City jails daily, the action plan is an opportune way to both cut back on crime and jail populations as well as ensure that those suffering from mental illnesses or mental issues receive the appropriate risk assessment and help they need. I commend the Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System for taking such an in-depth look at both public health and public safety strategies, which have previously been inadequately viewed as somewhat mutually exclusive.”

“I applaud the Mayor for rolling out these criminal justice reforms, which provide a more holistic approach in the way we limit crime in our communities,” said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams, Deputy Leader and Co-Chair of the Council’s Taskforce to Combat Gun Violence**. “Preventing crime cannot be left to policing tactics alone, which is why I along with others have worked tirelessly to combat gun violence using a multi-pronged approach involving all City agencies, community members and violence-interrupter groups. This shift in the way we deal with public safety is the only way to fix the broken system that has been in place for far too long.”

“Enhancing public safety is about effectively deploying key resources to improve the quality of life for New Yorkers throughout our City, and I welcome Mayor de Blasio’s plan to pro-actively redirect how the criminal justice system interacts with those living with mental health issues,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair of the Public Safety Committee**. “This is not simply a matter of making communities throughout our city safer—it is also about treating our fellow New Yorkers with dignity and ensuring that unprecedented resources are committed to making a difference in the lives of those living with complex illnesses that can impair their behavior.”

“Our courts are clogged with petty criminal cases that would be better handled within a compassionate mental health system, and Mayor de Blasio’s reforms will benefit individuals needing treatment and taxpayers alike,” said **Council Member Rory I. Lancman, Chair of the Committee on Courts & Legal Services**.

“People suffering from behavioral health illnesses ought not be punished for their health care needs,” said **Jill Furillo, Executive Director of the New York State Nurses Association**. “Our society is safer in the end when illness is met with compassion. We thank the task force for its important deliberations and findings.”

“As doctors, we applaud and support the hard work and recommendations of Mayor de Blasio’s Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System,” said **Dr. Frank Proscia, President of Doctors Council SEIU**. “Our members at Rikers Island and in hospitals and clinics everyday see individuals with behavioral health issues. It is vital that these individuals receive the proper medical care and intervention as early as possible and that a comprehensive plan and system is in place to address their needs. The proper use of resources to address mental health issues can lead to individuals with behavioral health issues receiving the care they need, when they need it, and in the right setting and programs.”

“We are delighted with the recommendations, which reflect a truly important and new approach in New York to helping people with behavioral health needs who come into contact with the criminal justice system,” said **Steve Coe, Chief Executive Officer of Community Access**. “The L.A. model for training police to recognize behavioral health needs and divert individuals to services instead of arrest is great, and I’m glad to see the City embracing and building upon it.”

“We commend the de Blasio administration for recognizing the important intersection between criminal justice and behavioral health,” said **Wendy Brennan, Executive Director of the National Association of Mental Illness New York**. “This action plan represents impressive progress and we look forward to working to implement these improvements and to the additional work to come.”

“The last thing that people who misuse drugs and alcohol need is more interaction with the criminal justice system,” said **Alyssa Aguilera, Political Director of VOCAL-NY**. “Behavioral health issues should be met with public health interventions, not needless and costly trips to jail. We applaud Mayor de Blasio for dedicating resources to divert individuals away from arrests and towards vital social services.”

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