

County Executive Parisi, Board Chair: Announce plans to pursue development of mental health triage and restoration center

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and County Board Chair Analiese Eicher announced a major initiative to divert those with behavioral health challenges from the criminal justice system, and to further extend recovery services available in our community. Building on the significant investments in mental health and addiction recovery services in the 2020 budget, the 2021 budget will include \$300,000 to plan a mental health triage and restoration center.

“We’ve demonstrated over the past decade when it comes to behavioral health we are going to be bold and lead progressively, and today’s announcement does just that,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. “In recent years we built a one-million-dollar a year school-based mental health program, partnered with community centers to provide on-site mental health programming for youth, and expanded opportunities to address trauma and addiction. In just a few weeks we will mark the opening of the brand new Dane County Behavioral Health Resource Center – a one stop service to better connect residents with mental health and addiction services when they need them, where they need them. I look forward to working with the County Board on this next important improvement to mental and behavioral health in this community,” Parisi concluded.

A triage and restoration center (also known as a crisis center or a stabilization center) provides services to address mental health challenges both inside and outside the criminal justice system. It is generally grounded in the concept of “no wrong door” and individuals can access services by walking in, a referral from a

community partner, or be brought by law enforcement.

“I am very pleased the County Executive is including this important initiative in his 2021 budget,” said County Board Chair Analiese Eicher, who also serves as the Chair of the Criminal Justice Council. “The triage and restoration center is a key part of our criminal justice reform package to keep people out of jail, and to improve the health of the community. This innovation is in use in communities throughout the country. The planning of Dane County’s triage and restoration center is the result of several years of community-involved research and advocacy.”

Even with substantial annual investment in mental illness and addiction services – totaling almost \$65 million per year – our community and law enforcement is many times left with only two options: jail or the emergency room. A triage and restoration center provides an alternative to the justice system for the community to use as a response to individuals in a behavioral health-related crisis.

“We have a strong commitment to criminal justice reform. We’ve made great strides by implementing a community restorative court and other jail diversion programming,” said Parisi. “But the fact remains that an estimated 40 percent of those in the Dane County Jail suffer from mental illnesses; and we must do everything we can to support those in crisis and find safe alternatives to incarceration whenever possible.”

Nationally, 1 in 5 individuals struggle with mental illness, meaning that almost every family has direct experience with the challenges individuals face.

“NAMI Dane County is grateful that the county is taking the lead in developing the blueprint for a triage and restoration center,” said Anna Moffit, Executive Director of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Dane County. “We know it will take a community-wide effort to make the dream of the center a reality. As a member of the Criminal Justice Council-Behavioral Health Subcommittee, we have learned of the collaborative efforts in other communities to establish crisis centers. Our organization looks forward to working not only with the county, but also with our partners in health care, local municipalities, and the business community throughout the next year on this pivotal project.”

The County Executive’s full 2021 budget will be introduced on October 1st.