

MIDDLESEX COUNTY RESTORATION CENTER COMMISSION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW



Individuals with mental illness and/or substance use disorders have high rates of contact with law enforcement. Consequently, **a disproportionate share of inmates and detainees in county correctional facilities have behavioral health conditions and corresponding treatment needs.** For instance, approximately 45% of inmates and detainees in the Middlesex County Jail & House of Correction have a mental illness and 80% have a substance use condition. Even brief incarceration puts their clinical stability and their futures at substantial risk. Accordingly, law enforcement officials and human services professionals often seek ways to divert such individuals from the criminal justice system. **In many cases the easiest diversion is a hospital emergency department (ED).** Unfortunately, EDs often cannot provide an appropriate level of care and sometimes individuals with behavioral needs experience long waits for treatment, discharge, or placement, called “ED boarding.”

The Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission, created by Section 225 of Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018 (the Criminal Justice Reform Act), was tasked with examining the mental health and addiction treatment system in Middlesex County and investigating the creation of a **restoration center, which is a behavioral healthcare facility that can provide urgent psychiatric care and/or crisis stabilization services and other related social and health services in less restrictive settings than hospitals or jails.** The Commission is co-chaired by Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and Danna Mauch, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health.

After identifying **gaps in the availability and accessibility of diversionary behavioral health services**, the Commission report offered a number of recommendations. Most important, the Commission found that a **restoration center in Middlesex County, in combination with improvements to the behavioral healthcare system, could help to address many of the identified services gaps, thereby reducing arrest and emergency department utilization and generating cost savings.** As proposed, the restoration center would use an integrated care model for delivery of mental health and substance use services that would include:

- A training component for first responders and law enforcement;
- An ability to accept both police drop-offs and walk-in clients;
- An alternative to emergency departments;
- A viable alternative to court petitions for behavioral health commitment;
- A wide array of services available to all clients, regardless of insurance type or status, including assessment, triage, medical clearance, crisis stabilization services, behavioral health urgent care, respite, mobile crisis teams, case management, a sober support unit, and psychopharmacology;
- Leveraging existing services and community partners where possible; and
- Locating in a high-need, high-density, and service-poor community.

The second year of work is underway and the Commission looks forward to filing another report in April 2020. Meanwhile, the members will work with their colleagues and the Legislature to develop a pilot restoration center in Middlesex County that will be a model for the rest of the Commonwealth and for the Nation.