

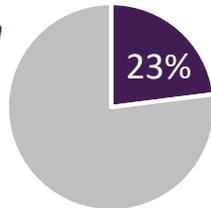
# Expand Behavioral Health Diversion

*The recommended policies improve criminal justice responses to individuals with behavioral health needs*

## Background

Michigan's jails are overwhelmed with people experiencing behavioral health challenges. Based on recent state data, at least 23 percent of people entering Michigan jails have a serious mental illness. In rural counties, the share is even higher – more than 33 percent. And these numbers don't include the many more people with other behavioral health needs, including substance use disorders, depression, and

***Statewide, nearly 1 in 4 people admitted to jail have a serious mental illness***



anxiety. The Michigan Jails Task Force heard over and over about the costs and challenges of addressing behavioral health needs in jails and the scarcity of community-based alternatives, especially in rural areas. Most law enforcement and jail officers are not equipped to provide behavioral health treatment or intervention, and lack of training can be dangerous for both officers and people in crisis.

## Supporting Communities and Law Enforcement

The Jails Task Force's recommended policies are designed to keep individuals with behavioral health needs from entering or staying in the justice system ("diversion") by supporting the law enforcement professionals who frequently encounter these individuals. The policies add statutory guidance around pre-arrest and post-arrest diversion, invest resources into making diversion programs more available across the state, and train officers to identify and manage individuals who could benefit from diversion. Investing in community-based treatment and behavioral health training benefits everyone: officers and communities are safer, law enforcement time and resources are used more efficiently, and individuals get the support they need to lead healthy and productive lives.

***"You wouldn't bring someone having a heart attack to a jail. But every day, people having mental health crises are brought here because there's nowhere else for them to go."***

## Recommended Policies

To improve criminal justice responses to individuals with behavioral health needs, the Jails Task Force recommended:

- *Law enforcement testimony before the Jails Task Force*

- Adding statutory guidance that authorizes localities to create diversion programs and encourages diversion in certain cases, with consideration for public safety and resource availability.
  - Providing funding to support the development and expansion of local programs.
- Diverting individuals charged with misdemeanors whose competency to stand trial is in question.
- Requiring the development of statewide training standards in behavioral health and crisis response for dispatch, law enforcement, and jail officers.
  - Providing funding to support the development and implementation of that training.

*Recommended by the*  
**Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration**