

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Delaware Judiciary and the Department of Health and Social Services host  
first-ever Delaware Behavioral Health and  
Criminal Justice Integration Summit**

*The two-day summit brought together more than 500 legal, law enforcement and social service professionals and community members to address mental and behavioral health issues in the courts*

On May 22 and 23, 2023 the Delaware Judiciary, in partnership with the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), convened the first-ever Delaware Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Integration Summit to bring together a broad cross-section of criminal justice, law enforcement and public health professionals to discuss, address and collaborate on mental health, substance abuse and trauma in the court system.

Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. and DHSS Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Director Joanna Champney kicked off the two-day long event addressing more than 500 professionals and community members at the Chase Center on the Riverfront. “To quote President Biden, this is a big deal,” said Chief Justice Seitz.

One recurring theme of the summit was how better tackling behavioral health issues by all involved in the justice system can not only result in better outcomes for those dealing with trauma, addiction and mental health challenges, but can also bring down crime rates as a large percentage of those involved in the courts and in the state’s prisons suffer from behavioral health issues.

“This conference was all about helping the justice system and behavioral health professionals find the balance between helping justice-involved clients be accountable for their behavior while also addressing their underlying behavioral health issues,” said Champney.

The Delaware Judiciary’s Statewide Treatment Court Coordinator, Minda V. Thompson, said the summit was a natural extension of the Judiciary’s Community Court initiative, which is focused more on addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior – often tied to addiction and mental health issues – than punishment. “If we can get everyone in a room together at an event like this, we can develop a common language and strategies to comprehensively address behavioral health issues, improving outcomes and reducing recidivism. We hope this is just the beginning and not the end of this collaboration,” she said.

Among the specific topics addressed at the summit were: data-driven solutions, holistic trauma-responsive approaches, overcoming communication barriers, connecting treatment to recovery, reducing recidivism, addressing youth mental health, medication-assisted treatment, burnout prevention for staff, diversion programs, community-based responses, , community supervision best practices, issues related to fentanyl and xylazine, and autism awareness in the criminal justice system.

Among the attendees were members of law enforcement, judges and court staff, treatment providers, department of correction offices and probation and parole staff, prosecutors, public defenders, social service staffers and members of community organizations.

Featured speakers included Dr. Douglas Marlowe, Dr. Shannon Carey, prosecutor Helen Harberts, Dr. Brian Meyer and Miami Dade County Circuit Court Associate Administrative Judge Steve Leifman.

Thompson said it took a team effort to make the summit happen. “There were a lot of helping hands that worked on planning and execution of this summit and I’m extremely grateful they were a part of things,” she said, noting that the summit planning partners, in addition to the Department of Health and Social Services, included the Office of Defense Services, the Department of Justice, the Department of Corrections, the Delaware State Police, the New Castle County Police, the Delaware Services for Children, Youth and Families, the National Center for State Courts, and the Criminal Justice Council.

In addition, the summit was made possible by funding through the Bureau of Justice Assistance – both directly and through law enforcement partners – along with the State Justice Institute and the DHSS Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health.