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SHERIFF DART, SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST FAITH LEADERS MEET ON PLAN FOR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH HUBS TO KEEP PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS OUT OF JAIL

No one thinks Cook County Jail is the best place to treat and house people with mental illness. Yet on any given day, at least 30 percent of the inmates at Cook County Jail suffer from mental illness.

Monday night, South and Southwest Side faith leaders will hold a public meeting with Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart to announce a vision for community-based mental health hubs as an alternative to incarceration. Community and Church leaders working as the Reclaim Campaign have called for the reduction of the jail population through diversion of nonviolent persons and the use of savings for community treatment and violence prevention.

Sheriff Dart will join leaders of Gamaliel Metro Chicago, the South West Organizing Project, the Community Renewal Society, the Mental Health Project of STOP and more than 1,000 South and Southwest Side residents at a public meeting to address the problem and announce an alternative vision at a public meeting **at 7:00 p.m. Monday, July 21 at St. Gall Church, 55th Street and Kedzie in Chicago.**

The proposal is to use the Affordable Care Act and reallocate city and state funds to provide mental health support services to initially 75 persons by creating community-based mental health centers, or hubs, to serve as diversion and re-entry alternatives to incarceration. The Hubs will also offer comprehensive restorative justice and prevention as a means of reducing violence and creating new life directions for hundred of other struggling youth and young adults on the south and southwest side of Chicago.

“The funds that should be used to provide community treatment and youth support services are now tied up incarcerating nonviolent persons who suffer from mental health and addiction,” said Dr. Alvin Love of the Gamaliel African American Organizing Table. “We can eliminate violence and provide a just and compassionate alternative if our communities are allowed to care for our own.”

Increased mental health counseling for at risk youth and mental health services for immigrants who are not covered by the Affordable Care Act are also on the agenda. Teresa Fraga, a leader in grassroots health care for immigrants said “Mental Health care is a human right. We can not deny immigrants access.”

Cook County Jail is the largest psychiatric facility in the state of Illinois. Sheriff Dart has become a national spokesperson for community based mental health alternatives to incarceration.

“This is an effort of all or our institutions...our churches, our public schools, and our social service agencies,” said Father Anthony Pizzo of the South West Organizing Project. “We stop violence when we invest in youth and young adults.”

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