

# A Day of Conversation About Improvement and Change: The NH Judicial Branch's "Mental Health Summit" on June 21

By Laura Kiernan

Every day across the country, the relentless impact of mental illness is painfully evident in the justice system. Judges and court staff are routinely faced with individuals whose conduct was likely the product of mental illness. Courtrooms are the "entry point" for too many individuals in need of treatment and services.

Three years ago, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators convened a task force to address mental illness in our justice system. Last fall, the task force issued a sweeping report on improving how state courts respond to mental illness. Three years of work grounded on those facts and research made it clear from the outset that court leaders are not going to solve America's mental health crisis. But, the report said, state court judges can—and should—take the lead in a collaborative effort to examine how the justice system responds to mental illness and devise strategies to improve the outcomes. (*Editor's Note: You can view the task force's report at [sji.gov/mental-health-task-force-mhtf](http://sji.gov/mental-health-task-force-mhtf).)*)

The New Hampshire Judicial Branch is now one of 45 state court systems that have joined in the effort, armed with a blueprint of initiatives and leadership guidelines laid out by the task force. A "Mental Health Summit" led by New Hampshire Supreme Court Chief Justice Gordon J. MacDonald and Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts Dianne Martin, is scheduled for June 21 in Concord.

"Here in New Hampshire, we want to come together—the court system, community stakeholders, and government leaders—to improve our collective response to those

with mental health needs, and create action plans for change," they said in inviting a far-reaching list of participants—from judges and law enforcement to individuals living with mental illness—to attend a "day-long conversation" aimed at developing improvements and solutions through partnerships and collaboration.

In its report, the task force cited the "need and responsibility" of state courts to take charge of the effort to make systemic changes in the way the courts respond to mental illness.

"While the statistics can be overwhelming and the challenges immense, a national focus on problems has created a momentum for change," the task force's final report said.

Members of the task force included chief justices, top court administrators, behavioral health professionals, law enforcement and corrections jail officials, community members, and individuals who had been through the court system.

"We see how the justice system can become a never-ending highway of pain as it maneuvers people on a needless journey, with no off ramp, often to ineffective support and treatment," task force member Oregon Circuit Judge Nan Waller said when the final report was released.

According to the report, the impact of mental illnesses on the administration of justice reaches beyond the criminal courts—to



civil commitment cases, guardianships involving adults and juveniles, and family law. The Conference of State Court Administrators has urged their colleagues around the country to examine the mental health crisis and its impact on "fair justice."

"Judges and court personnel are in a unique position to describe to policymakers what they see in their courtrooms every day – a broken system, leading to compromised public safety, excessive incarceration, and dam-

aged lives," the court administrators wrote. Their blunt assessment of the need for change – in a 2016 policy paper – led to the formation of the National Judicial Task Force, endorsed by the Conference of Chief Justices, and supported by the National Center for State Courts and the State Justice Institute.

Last year, a team from New Hampshire, led by Chief Justice MacDonald and AOC Director Martin, attended a regional summit in Vermont—one of five held throughout the country—which focused on collaboration among state courts, community leaders, and behavioral health providers on key issues affecting their state.

In April 2023, the Chief Justice MacDonald and Martin announced the launch of a statewide initiative to conduct sequential intercept mapping (SIM), beginning with a pilot project in Merrimack County. The goal of SIM is to identify where the justice sys-

tem, corrections, health and human services, community stakeholders, and mental health professionals can effectively intervene as individuals with mental illness make their way through the court process. The objective is to keep those individuals in their communities, with treatment resources and support, and out of jail. More than 70 criminal justice, corrections, mental health, substance abuse, and social service professionals attended, as well as individuals and families who have experience with the justice system and mental health issues.

"Every one of us is touched in some way by mental illness; in a friend, a family member, a colleague, or ourselves," Martin said to the gathering. "Those working in the court system are touched by individuals experiencing mental illness, people in crisis, and people experiencing trauma, who come into our courts every day. We all recognize we need to do better for them. But we cannot do it alone. This change requires education, training, access to treatment and most importantly, collaboration across the state."

The June 21 Mental Health Summit is supported by a grant from the State Justice Institute. The Summit planning team members, in addition to Chief Justice MacDonald and Martin, are Commissioner of New Hampshire Department of Corrections Helen Hanks, Director of New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Division for Behavioral Health Katja Fox, New Hampshire State Police Mental Health and Wellness Coordinator Russell Conte, Former NAMI-NH Executive Director Ken Norton, New Hampshire Judicial Branch Mental Health and Wellness Coordinator Anne Zinkin, and Patti Tobias and John Bello from the National Center for State Courts. ■

## Committee on Cooperation With the Courts

### Practice Information and Tips from the Federal District Court Clerk's Office

*Editor's Note: The Bar News will now include a periodic column from the Committee on Cooperation with the Courts on practical tips for practitioners concerning issues the Committee is addressing. The Committee is made up of practitioners, judges, and court administrators, and seeks to enhance communications between the Bench and Bar. The following article is the first in this series.*

By Daniel J. Lynch and Tracy A. Uhrin

In an effort to provide attorneys with more practical practice guidance and advice, the Committee on Cooperation with the Courts is having members write a Side Bar article with information and practice tips from the different court types across the state. Below is some general information about clerk's office operations as well as practical tips from the clerk's office on practicing in the United States District Court in the District of New Hampshire.

#### Clerk's Office Structure

In the District of New Hampshire, the Clerk of Court (Dan Lynch) and Chief Deputy Clerk (Tracy Uhrin) oversee five departments: Operations (i.e., Case Man-

agement), Court Reporters, Petit/Grand Jury, Administration (i.e., CJA and restitution payments/registry fund deposits and payments/attorney admissions and bar certificates), and Information Technology. The direct dial telephone number and court email address for all staff members in these departments is available to practitioners and the public on the court's website at [nhd.uscourts.gov](http://nhd.uscourts.gov). To access this contact information, hover over "Contact Information" on the menu bar and select the "Court Information" link.

#### Practical Tips

**Case Information and Case Filing Questions:** Lawyers and the public most frequently interact with the court's Operations department. For example, new cases are reviewed and randomly assigned to a judge by our Intake Department. Once a case is assigned to a judge, a designated case manager for the assigned judge manages the docket/case filings and courtroom proceedings for that judge. Case managers are assigned to cases based on the judge and the case number's terminal digit. Thus, if you have a question regarding a specific case, including e-filing questions, the case manager assigned to the case is the person with

the most knowledge about the case and is most likely the best person to answer your question. Again, direct contact information for the intake team and the case managers is available on the Contact Information flyout on the Court Information menu bar option.

**Court Transcripts:** If an attorney would like to obtain a transcript of a trial or hearing, they should request it directly from the court reporter. The minute entry for the proceeding will identify the court reporter who took the record. The Transcript Request section under the Case Management menu bar option on the court's website lists the names and e-mail addresses of the court reporters and outlines the ordinary transcript rate as well as the rate for expedited, daily, and hourly transcripts.

**Website Resources:** Taking some time to tour the resources on the court's website will greatly benefit those who plan to practice in federal court. In addition to the resources referenced above, attorneys may benefit from the following information on the website:

**Subscription Service for Court Decisions/Information:** Those practitioners who want to obtain both published and unpublished District of New Hampshire

opinions, as well as summaries of First Circuit decisions, can sign up to receive them by e-mail through the court's Subscription Service link under the Quick Links section on the home page.

**Searching for Unpublished/Published Opinions:** The Opinions Search feature under the Quick Links section of the home page allows practitioners to conduct subject matter searches for both published and many unpublished opinions issued by the judges in this district.

**Jury Trial/Selection Information and Jury Verdicts:** By accessing the Jury & Bench Trials section from the Case Management option on the menu bar, attorneys can obtain the jury trial periods for each judge for the next two years. This page also contains information on the jury selection process in this district. Finally, jury verdicts since 2003 are also available on the Public Outreach link under Statistics & Reports menu bar option.

**Rules Information and Standing Orders:** In addition to links to the Federal Rules of Evidence as well as to the Federal Civil and Criminal Rules of Procedure, the Rules & Orders section under

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