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Contact:

Redmond Haskins

Rhaskins@legal-aid.org

929.441.2384

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Statewide Coalition Marks Mental Health Awareness Month with Lobby Day and Press Conference Urging Passage of Treatment Court Expansion Act

TCEA is necessary to relieve burdens on the mental health and criminal legal systems

TCEA is a fiscally responsible measure that will improve public safety

(ALBANY, NY) - In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, elected officials, healthcare professionals, advocates, academics, faith leaders, attorneys, and individuals directly impacted by the State's warehousing of people with mental health and substance use issues held a lobby day and press conference to call for the passage of the Treatment Court Expansion Act. This legislation would connect individuals to appropriate services when deemed suitable by a judge, has been shown to reduce recidivism, and would save the state and taxpayers millions of dollars.

For decades, New York has primarily relied on our jails and prison as the default response for individuals experiencing serious mental health and substance use disorders. This approach has been proven to lead to [further institutional involvement and crime](#), ultimately creating [immense harm](#) to both the individual and the general public, all while [costing the state billions](#).

Mental health courts offer a proven, humane alternative. These courts divert individuals into treatment and supportive services instead of jail, [dramatically reducing recidivism](#) and improving public safety and health outcomes.

The Treatment Court Expansion Act would provide the legislative authority to establish mental health courts in every county in the state, similar to the way Drug Law Reform created drug courts across the state in 2009. Expanding and modernizing our state's diversion court network would safely off-ramp tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year.

The proposed legislation comes at a critical time. In the wake of the wildcat strike by state corrections officers early this year, severe staffing shortages have pushed the prison system to a breaking point, prompting calls to drastically reduce the prison population.

TCEA would allow people to receive the appropriate, court-monitored treatment to address their specific needs, helping to end the revolving door of incarceration.

“New York can’t jail its way out of the mental health and addiction crisis,” said **Senator Jessica Ramos**, lead Senate sponsor of the bill. “The Treatment Court Expansion Act (TCEA) puts proven compassion and mental health science into law, steering people toward care, reducing recidivism, and saving taxpayers hundreds of millions. Mental health, addiction, and cognitive disabilities require treatment, not punishment. When we prioritize care over incarceration, we build safer communities.”

“Treatment courts have been shown to be incredibly effective across New York State, yet hundreds of New Yorkers are denied access to those programs,” said **Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest**, lead Assembly sponsor of the bill. “That’s why the Treatment Court Expansion Act has support from a wide variety of stakeholders. As a healthcare provider myself, I recognize that when people have the opportunity to ask for and receive help, it benefits everyone.”

“The Treatment Court Expansion Act (TCEA) and the peer model it embodies offers individuals the support they need to live in the community where they can continue the path of recovery and mental health resilience,” said **Charles Corbin, Youth Recovery Service Project Coordinator, Exodus Transitional Community**. “It is essential for citizens of the empire state to receive treatment for mental health and substance use. When that opportunity isn't present the citizen becomes an unproductive statistic.”

“Incarceration is not the answer to public safety — especially as we continue to witness the inhumane conditions and mistreatment faced by individuals caught in the ongoing crisis at Rikers Island and across New York State prisons,” said **Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Treatment Court Expansion Act presents a long-overdue, life-saving alternative by creating a path to treatment for thousands of people in jail living with mental health conditions, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders. Grounded in harm reduction and guided by clinically trained professionals, this legislation offers a compassionate, evidence-based approach that centers healing, public health, and community safety. We urge Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie to enact this essential bill without delay.”

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