



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Contact: Amie M. Downs
412-350-3711 (office)
412-327-3700 (cell)
amie.downs@alleghenycounty.us

County to Begin Competency Restoration Effort

PITTSBURGH – Allegheny County today announced that it has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify and contract with a service provider to create a Mobile Competency Restoration and Support Team (MCRST). The MCRST would be charged with providing behavioral health services for persons deemed not competent to stand trial, providing an alternative to inpatient treatment at Torrance State Hospital for individuals who could be restored to competency in other settings.

“Currently, inpatient treatment at Torrance State Hospital is the only option for individuals who are found not competent to stand trial. There are long wait times that cause longer stays in jail and further impact those individuals incarcerated here,” said Warden Orlando Harper. “Recognizing that impact, the jail worked with the Courts, Human Services, and the Public Defender’s Office on a solution that will provide support for competency restoration locally. While not the county’s responsibility, these efforts will result in fewer and shorter stays in jail while awaiting restoration, increased engagement with community treatment services, and fewer re-commitments through the system.”

The MCRST model was designed collaboratively with partners from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Criminal Division of Fifth Judicial District’s Court, including Pretrial Services’ Behavior Assessment Unit, to meet the specific needs of Allegheny County. It incorporates promising local competency restoration models operating elsewhere in the country, and data and feedback provided by BAU staff and evaluators. The team will operate as a community-based resource and will also bring supplementary treatment supports into the jail for eligible individuals.

“A mobile restoration clinic will allow our clients to receive mental health treatment in a community setting and will eliminate unnecessary time spent in incarceration,” said Chief Public Defender Matt Dugan. “We truly appreciate the work of all parties involved in making this option a reality for our residents. We were proud to be a part of it.”

In the current system, all individuals who are assessed as incompetent to stand trial and who are potentially “restorable” are committed via court order to Torrance State Hospital. This includes including those recommended for release on bond. Torrance serves 48 counties and has a capacity of 104 forensic beds. As a result of that limited capacity, many individuals in need of competency restoration services remain in the jail until a Torrance bed becomes available.

Between 2018-2021, the median wait time in Allegheny County from commitment to admission in Torrance State Hospital was 54 days. Challenges created by the pandemic have increased that wait time. A recent average was as high as 60 days. Currently, there are 25 individuals who are awaiting transfer to Torrance State Hospital for competency restoration. Six of them have been waiting 60 days or more for transfer.

“While the focus of this effort is around competency restoration and reducing wait times in jail, we have designed a model that will bring additional behavioral health supports and coordination of services to some of our highest need residents,” said DHS Director Erin Dalton. “Our hope is that we can connect them to more care more quickly, help them remain engaged in care, and reduce the likelihood of them returning to jail.”

With the MCRST model, a multidisciplinary competency team will develop a treatment plan and provide competency restoration and support services within the community for individuals recommended for release. The MCRST will connect or reconnect individuals to longer-term services as well, helping to create conditions for long term recovery and reduce future incarceration.

"I'm extremely grateful for the work that has been done by these partners to date," said Harper. "We look forward to the implementation of this team locally and the positive impact that it will have on our population."

The county will contract with a service provider through a competitive bidding process and has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP). The full RFP can be found at [https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/Doing-Business/Solicitations-\(RFP/RFQ/RFI\).aspx](https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/Doing-Business/Solicitations-(RFP/RFQ/RFI).aspx). Current plans are for a spring launch of the program, dependent on the RFP and contracting process.

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County Manager's Office

119 Courthouse | 436 Grant Street | Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: 412-350-5300 | www.alleghenycounty.us

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