



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
**JOINT STATE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION**  
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**SUMMARY** – *Mental Health Services and  
the Criminal Justice System in Pennsylvania, May 2014*

In recognition of the continuing struggles within the mental health and criminal justice communities to find adequate treatment and services for persons with mental illness, 2013 House Resolution 226 directed the staff of the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study of “all aspects of Pennsylvania’s mental health system and report back with specific recommendations for amendments and improvement, particularly as to how criminal defendants with mental illness are addressed by established procedures, policies and programs.”

The Commission report examined the following topics:

- Laws governing the mental health system and treatment of persons with mental illness, including the Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Act of 1966 and the Mental Health Procedures Act (1976).
- The mental health delivery system under the Department of Public Welfare and its Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, including the state hospital system and the Commonwealth’s 48 county mental health and intellectual disability programs.
- Mental health services in the criminal justice system, including services provided by the Department of Corrections and the Department of Public Welfare as well as county correctional institutions and jails.
- The criminal justice agencies within the Commonwealth that have a significant role in the treatment of prisoners with mental health issues, including the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole.
- The various sources of state and federal funds that fund services to persons with mental illness in Pennsylvania.
- The areas of concern within both the mental health and criminal justice systems that impact the care and treatment and recovery of persons with mental illness, including:
  - Restrictive commitment standards.
  - How to address serious threats of danger that do not rise to committable behavior.
  - Availability of psychiatric inpatient beds.
  - Shortages of mental health professionals.
  - Probation and parole of persons with mental illness and the barriers that result in longer lengths of stay and waiting lists for services.

The report also contains recommendations to improve the quantity and quality of services to persons with mental illness, including:

- Increased and coordinated funding.
- Use of evidence-based practices by the county mental health/intellectual disability programs.
- Use of the sequential intercept model as a means of diverting persons with mental illness from the criminal justice system.
- Supporting the efforts of the Departments of Public Welfare and Corrections and the counties to coordinate a more efficient and effective mental health delivery system and to address some of the areas of concern previously expressed.
- Codifying the Mental Health Procedures Act to update and modernize an almost 40-year old statute and amend it to allow earlier intervention for a narrowly-defined group of persons with mental illness whose disease and symptoms can be identified and addressed before severe psychological decompensation occurs.

**The full report is available at:** <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>