

2014 Nomination for the Southeast Region –Dauphin County

“The mission of the Dauphin County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) is to enhance the criminal justice system and public safety through a collaborative and targeted approach which prioritizes the support of evidence-based practices and innovative strategies while maintaining fiscal responsibility and maximizing outside resources.”

For the past 13 years, the Dauphin County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) has been engineering success in our state capital’s criminal justice system. This collaborative, progressive and multi-disciplinary group of criminal justice and other professional stakeholders prides itself on trying to stay steps ahead of the fluctuating crime flow by being honest about their situation and proactive in seeking solutions. Dauphin County CJAB embodies every essential element of a successful CJAB, including a strong mission statement, committed leadership and support, engagement in real strategic planning, compliance with new and changing state and federal requirements and an overall spirit of cooperation with successful results.

The mission of the CJAB is boldly stated across the top of every bi-monthly meeting agenda as a constant reminder of the purpose of the group. It is revisited in virtually every CJAB discussion to assure not only that the mission continues to reflect the purpose of the group, but that all priorities identified by the CJAB fall within the scope of the mission.

Chaired by District Attorney Edward M. Marsico, Jr., the CJAB is supported by a full-time Drug Court and CJAB Coordinator. In 2011, the Dauphin County CJAB hired Catharine Kilgore, a committed and enthusiastic person with experience in CJAB capacity building after serving as CJAB Coordinator in Lebanon County for several years. In both counties, Catharine served as an essential state-to-county liaison between PCCD and the field of CJAB coordinators, assisting in pilot projects, surveys and developing training and conferences for CJAB members statewide. Regardless of the project, Catharine takes back the information and lessons learned in her statewide involvement and works with DA Marsico to implement those changes in Dauphin County. This allows the county CJAB to emerge as a leader of the CJAB pack, working collaboratively in the spirit envisioned by PCCD to create shared direction and true attention to criminal issues that mire the system and impact individual lives.

In October 2011, the Dauphin County CJAB engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process and, after accomplishing several goals, revised the plan again in 2013 to create new goals and improve strategies for on-going projects. The CJAB was able to successfully achieve these goals through bi-monthly meetings during which the strategic plan and successes are shared and further steps are discussed and agreed upon.

Since 2011, as a direct result of CJAB strategic planning, Dauphin County’s entire criminal justice system has improved through ardent collaboration of CJAB members. Membership was expanded to include the Director of Human Services, overseer of Drug and Alcohol, Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities and Children and Youth Services, adding significant value to planning and re-entry services.

As a result of the planning process, Dauphin County revamped its criminal court structure and process. After several visits to other 3rd class counties to educate themselves about how other

counties work, the CJAB worked to create a new system designed to optimize vertical prosecution, reduce the number of continuances and improve case-flow processing. A positive outcome of the restructuring is that improved data collection and access allows the CJAB to identify and address areas in which the criminal process is being unnecessarily delayed, thereby allowing for a more efficient use of resources.

In January 2012, a new Veterans Court program was created as a result of strategic planning. To date, the court has served over 30 Veterans, held five graduations and boasts a 90% retention rate. Thirty veteran mentors have volunteered to work with participants in this program. In 2013, Veterans Court administrators presented at the Drexel University Veterans Court Conference on the success of its program.

Strategic planning gave rise to the need for specialized focus groups. As such, the CJAB System Enhancement Team (SET), Violent Crimes Taskforce (VCTF), a Re-Entry Subcommittee and a Risk and Needs Assessment work group were formed. The SET team works as a steering committee for the Board and meets monthly to keep the momentum of CJAB projects going. The VCTF reviews and prioritize issues that relate to violent crime in Dauphin County and accepts proposals for funding for projects related to addressing these issues as table gaming funds permit. This subcommittee has dedicated funding towards resources for the Harrisburg Police Department (HPD) for a number of public safety projects as well as development of the Dauphin County Crime Watch Portal. The impact of these funds is being measured, and the VCTF is committed to supporting proposals that will have the greatest impact on crime in the county. In addition to the Re-Entry Committee, the CJAB supported the hiring of a consultant to perform a fundamental analysis of cases from point of entry into the justice system through post-sentence stages for the purpose of improving offender outcomes during the re-entry process to ultimately reduce recidivism.

Planning allowed the CJAB to see the need for the adoption of an appropriate risk and needs assessment tool and the group decided upon the Ohio Risk Assessment System which will provide a uniform method of classifying risk along all stages of the criminal justice process and assists the jail, probation & parole, and the Work Release Center with case planning which will in turn enable the county to better utilize evidence-based practices.

The Judicial Center opened in May, 2013. Among other functions, the Center serves as a Regional Booking site for Dauphin County. Since opening on a 24/7 basis, the Center provides one centralized location to streamline the arrest processing procedures, again to allow for better use of police resources. The building is adjacent to the Dauphin County Prison, and allows for the gathering of key criminal justice components under one roof – such as probation, victim witness, pre-trial and counseling and treatment services. The Center has a full courtroom and video conferencing capabilities so arrestees can also be arraigned without the judge having to travel to the facility. Additionally, intensive outpatient treatment, addiction meetings and risk and needs assessment work is being conducted at the Center.

Commissioner Jeff Haste, who is an active and dedicated member of the CJAB, was a strong proponent of this program from the beginning. At one meeting, Commissioner Haste reported walking around Harrisburg city neighborhoods in search of the best position for the Center. Throughout the planning process, he and Commissioner George Hartwick have been strong proponents of the CJAB and the work it is doing to improve the criminal process in Dauphin

County. This project is an excellent example of how, when county Commissioners and CJABs work together, innovative programming can be developed to ensure proper and efficient use of resources while addressing the needs of the criminal justice system and enhancing public safety.

Through the strong leadership and commitment of the CJAB members as a whole, Dauphin County has emerged as a leader for all others to follow. They have a strong connection to the pulse of state and federal criminal justice initiatives and work cohesively through honest assessment, frank communication and collaboration to improve the criminal system. It was the first and one of a few counties that worked together seamlessly through implementation of The Adam Walsh Act to become compliant with the new regulations, and is one of the first counties to be moving towards compliance with Prison Rape Elimination Act by establishing an inmate hotline for allegations of assault and an inmate rights video .

The fact that the Dauphin County CJAB is able to attract a packed room of important criminal justice stakeholders and government officials to each and every bi-monthly meeting is a true testament to the integrity and success of this group. As stated, in the non-meeting months, the dedicated CJAB Coordinator and Chair work with the SET committee to keep the planning goals alive and accomplished. For a city with a large crime problem where miscommunication and systematic failure could be a likely result, the Dauphin County CJAB works hard to ensure its own success and that of every person who is involved with or passes through the criminal justice system. Not only does it serve as a geographical center of the state, it's CJAB is at the heart of the important criminal justice system improvements currently being made throughout the state.

Due to their notable accomplishments and successes, staff proudly nominates Dauphin County for the 2014 CJAB Best Practices Award.