

2013 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.”

The Dauphin County CJAB has been in existence for approximately twelve years. In that time, the CJAB has encountered obstacles and endured changes but today it has emerged as a leader across the Commonwealth. It is a collaborative, progressive and multi-disciplinary group of criminal justice stakeholders and other professionals that easily reaches consensus, sets goals and achieves those goals to create impactful changes in the criminal justice system of our capital city and surrounding county.

The CJAB is chaired by District Attorney Edward M. Marsico, Jr. District Attorney Marsico also serves as a Commissioner for PCCD and serves as a member of PCCD’s Criminal Justice Advisory Committee. The CJAB has always had a dedicated CJAB Administrator who functions dually as the Drug Court Coordinator. In 2011, the Dauphin County CJAB hired Catharine Kilgore, a dynamic and enthusiastic person who came to Dauphin with experience in CJAB capacity building for criminal justice systems after serving as CJAB Coordinator in Lebanon County for several years.

Over the years, the Dauphin CJAB has evolved into a group that has worked to create a shared direction for the local criminal justice system. The CJAB has a keen ability to identify specific common goals. In October 2011, the CJAB engaged in a strategic planning process during which they acknowledged that in order to affect true change it was necessary to have a collective vision to determine future goals. The CJAB identified its core strengths, including the creation of a thriving collaboration among members who once operated in silos, the implementation of diversionary programs through problem solving courts, the introduction and use of innovative technology and successful efforts in prison population control. It identified a set of new goals including revising the court calendar and structure to increase effectiveness, formalizing a Veterans court program, pursuing accreditation of the existing drug court program, creating new subcommittees to address specific issues such as the use of gaming funds and developing cohesive re-entry programming.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the Dauphin County CJAB is the cohesive feeling that attending a meeting produces. For a city with a large crime problem, members are uniquely collaborative and engage in open discussion designed to seek solutions to problems. This collaborative spirit is evident within the community as well as City police share the success of a collaborative project involving neighboring police departments that take turns patrolling the city in order to provide additional resources and back-up for the metro police.

At each bi-monthly meeting, the CJAB members review the strategic plan goals and ask subcommittee members to report on progress made for each goal. As a matter of fact, many of the goals set forth in the 2012 Strategic Plan have been met, precipitating the need to host a new strategic planning session in March 2013.

Without ego or boundaries that often cause obstacles to true growth, CJAB members reached out to neighboring counties to learn about their court structure and court calendar success. As a result, the Dauphin County system was revised to more effectively move cases through the system and optimize the potential for vertical prosecution. The Veterans' Court Program was implemented in late January, 2012 and currently has 19 participants and 25 volunteer Veterans who work with program participants. A county-wide police record management system is set to roll out this year.

Additional successes include the formation of two new subcommittees: the Violent Crimes Taskforce (VCTF) and the CJAB System Enhancement Team (SET). The SET team works as a steering committee for the Board and meets during "odd" months opposite the bi-monthly CJAB meetings. 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. Gaming funds have been used for a variety of initiatives including police overtime, criminal justice staff development, support of the county-wide records management system and security cameras for the City of Harrisburg. The impact of these funds is being measured, and the VCTF is committed to supporting proposals that will have the most impact on the County's criminal justice system.

Finally, Dauphin County CJAB members are proud to announce that a new Criminal Justice Center is slated to open in May, 2013. Among other functions, this will serve as a Regional Booking site for Dauphin County. Commissioner Jeff Haste, who is an active and dedicated member of the CJAB, has been a strong proponent of this program. At one meeting, Commissioner Haste reported walking around Harrisburg city neighborhoods in search of the best position for the Center. While many CJABs struggle with involving local government officials, Commissioner Haste's dedication to the CJAB is evident in this and other CJAB projects with which he's been involved. The fact that the Dauphin County CJAB is able to attract a packed room of important criminal justice stakeholders and government officials is a true testament to the integrity and success of this group.

PCCD staff proudly nominates the Dauphin County CJAB for the 2013 County Commissioners' Association of Pennsylvania CJAB Best Practices Award.