

Jackie Lacey

District Attorney

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NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Paul Eakins
Public Information Officer
213-257-2000
PEakins@da.lacounty.gov
Twitter: @LADAOoffice

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District Attorney Jackie Lacey Launches Mental Health Division to Bolster Innovative Justice Efforts

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today announced an expansion of her office's efforts to help people living with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

The Mental Health Division brings together deputy district attorneys whose cases involve defendants who have been declared incompetent to stand trial or are seeking alternative sentences due to their mental illness.

The new division – the first of its kind in a prosecutor's office in California and, possibly, the nation – was established effective today.

"Our goal is to protect the public and to assist people in getting the mental health and other services they need to be productive members of our community," District Attorney Lacey said. "We also want to make sure that jails and prisons are reserved for the most serious and violent offenders."

The new division builds on District Attorney Lacey's legacy of leadership in seeking a more just and effective criminal justice system for people living with mental illness. The division staff will seek opportunities to expand treatment and other community-based services for people whose untreated mental illness historically has resulted in longer periods of incarceration and mental deterioration.

The Mental Health Division will serve as a resource to deputy district attorneys faced with questions about potential diversion cases and motions made under Senate Bill 1810, the new pre-trial mental health diversion law. It also will provide training to attorneys and first responders, advocate for more community-based mental health resources and pursue legislation to enact meaningful criminal justice reform in California.

An important internal policy component of this mental health continuum is District Attorney Lacey's directive that allows deputy district attorneys to consider a defendant's mental health when deciding if they should participate in a diversion program.

“With this policy, I am encouraging my lawyers to make courageous decisions and do the right thing,” District Attorney Lacey said. “We must make informed decisions to ensure public safety and help another human being in crisis.”

Since her election in 2012, District Attorney Lacey has worked diligently to address the needs of those with mental illness. She formed what would become the county’s Mental Health Advisory Board with mental health and criminal justice professionals in 2013.

The advisory board created its “Blueprint for Change,” a 2015 report that mapped out a path to address issues within the mental health and justice systems.

In response to its recommendations, District Attorney Lacey has provided free mental health awareness training to more than 1,400 first responders from smaller police agencies. The training shows first responders how to safely de-escalate encounters with people in a mental health crisis, improving the safety of the officers and the public.

In 2016, District Attorney Lacey appointed the nation’s first mental health liaison for a local prosecutorial agency. The liaison worked in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders to address ways to safely help people in a mental health crisis stay out of the criminal justice system.

[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office](#)

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims’ rights.