

Commission on Alternatives to Incarceration
Chairman Joseph Kroeber

Testimony by the
Cass County Jail Intervention Coordinating Committee
June 20, 2006

Chairman Kroeber and members of the Commission, thank you for the invitation to provide a brief update on Cass County's diversion project. For the record, my name is Sheree Spear, and I'm representing the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI ND). I'm also representing Cass County's Jail Intervention Coordinating Committee (JICC), as their volunteer project coordinator.

The Cass County Commission voted in January 2005 to officially support and recognize the JICC as the group in the County working on diversion issues relating to people with mental illness, with or without co-occurring substance abuse disorders. In 2006 the National Association of Counties, and members of the national Conference of Chief Justices, both passed resolutions in support of efforts to improve the response to people with mental illness who become involved in the criminal justice system. Since our presentation to you in March, Cass County submitted an application to the Department of Justice for federal grant funds for planning and implementation of a jail-based diversion project. Our application focused on post-booking, or Intercepts 2 and 3 of the GAINS Sequential Intercept model, which is the model applicants were required to adhere to. If selected, Cass County would receive \$50,000. for a final six month planning phase, and extensive technical assistance from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. That would be followed by \$200,000. for implementation for 24 months.

National response to this federal grant opportunity was tremendous, so there is a great deal of competition for those dollars. With or without being awarded this federal grant, we will need demonstrated State support through funding to provide the community-based services in Cass County needed to implement an effective program. Even if this grant is awarded, there would be a delta of \$291,000. per year to ensure adequate treatment and services are available.

I've provided you a copy of the signatures page of the Memorandum of Understanding which we submitted along with our application, so you can see some of the stakeholders who have committed support for this project. We also attached letters of support along with our application, including one from North Dakota's Supreme Court Chief Justice VandeWalle.

It is important to be aware that the strong support we've received is for this project, specifically. The support we've received is not for the concept alone. The individuals and agencies that have demonstrated their support have done so based upon careful consideration of the leadership involved, research the JICC has done, the nationally recognized recommendations they are following, and so on. We believe that your Commission, Mr. Chairman, can feel confident also in recommending to the Governor that funding for the Cass County project specifically, be included in his budget – knowing that it has under-gone evaluation by key stakeholders at both the State and local levels.

In August, it will have been two years since formed the Jail Intervention Coordinating Committee and began in-depth work on this issue. Time doesn't permit me to outline all of the hard work done by this group. They came together and engaged in cross-discipline sharing of their experiences encountered when trying to respond to those in the community with mental illness. By sharing difference perspectives, they gained a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by individuals with mental illness, and insight regarding the factors impacting other agencies. They gathered and shared relevant data, learned what other states are doing and what is working well. This group, the JICC, representing both those on the front-lines every day, as well as those involved in broader policy-making, worked hard to develop a diversion program that would work locally, and that would reflect well on North Dakota nationally. This type of cross-agency/cross-discipline collaboration is not seen everyday, but it has been achieved within Cass County's JICC. I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Department of Corrections and Department of Human Services for allowing some of their best and brightest to dedicate time to this project, bringing their expertise to bear on an issue that must be addressed.

There are other communities in the State that need to form the type of collaboration that can affect positive change on a local level. As an advocate for people with mental illness, I've spoken with people from around the State who have asked that we help them develop a diversion project within their area. While Cass County can share what they've learned, there are regional differences, so a strategy that will work for them must be

developed. The National Alliance on Mental Illness in North Dakota encourages your Commission to consider recommending funding be earmarked for diversion planning grants for several communities in the State. We respectfully ask that funding for those types of grants be in addition to a recommendation that the Cass County JICC project, specifically, be funded – thereby recognizing the solid work done and leadership role that Cass County has played in this area.

We greatly appreciate your willingness to consider our project for recommendation.

And, thank you for allowing me to update your Commission today, Mr. Chairman.

VII. Signatories

Cass County Commission
Fargo, North Dakota


Vern Bennett, Chairman

6-1-06
Date

East Central Judicial District
State of North Dakota


Georgia Dawson, Presiding Judge

5-31-06
Date

DHS/Southeast Human Service Center
ND Department of Human Services


Candace Fuglesten, Director

5-31-06
Date

Cass County Social Services
Fargo, North Dakota


Kathy Homan, Director

5/31/06
Date

North Dakota Department of Corrections and
Rehabilitation Division of Adult Field Services


Warren Emmer, Director

5-31-06
Date

Cass County States Attorney
Fargo, North Dakota


Birch Burdick, States Attorney

5/31/06
Date

Fargo Cass Public Health
Fargo, North Dakota


Heidi McLean, Nursing Supervisor


6/1/06
Date

Fargo Housing & Redevelopment Authority
Fargo, North Dakota


Lynn Fundingsland, Exec. Director

5-31-06
Date

Cass County Sheriff
Fargo, North Dakota


Donald Rudnick, Sheriff

5-31-06
Date

Fargo Police Department
Fargo, North Dakota


Keith Ternes, Chief

05-31-06
Date

West Fargo Police Department
West Fargo, North Dakota


Arland Rasmussen, Chief


05-31-06
Date

ND Mental Health Association
North Dakota


Susan Helgelaf, Executive Director


5/31/06
Date

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
North Dakota


Sheree Spear, Director

05-31-06
Date

Cass County Jail
Fargo, North Dakota


Glenn Ellingsberg, Administrator

5-31-06
Date