



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

Howard County Announces the Launch of the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Program

Interagency collaboration will help divert individuals with concerns related to behavioral health away from the criminal justice system and toward treatment

Howard County, MD (September 1, 2021) – Howard County will begin offering the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion or LEAD program to eligible participants starting Wednesday, September 1st, 2021. The program allows law enforcement officers to redirect low-level offenders engaged in misdemeanor crimes to community-based services instead of prosecution and incarceration. The goal of the LEAD program is to improve public health and public safety by reducing future harm and criminal behavior caused by individuals engaged in crimes related to unmet behavioral health needs.

"It is our responsibility as a community to evaluate and improve our public safety initiatives to ensure that we are providing the best possible outcomes for all our residents. The innovative, thoughtful, and proven LEAD program is a more effective, public-health-based approach," said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. "With LEAD, we can positively transform the way we handle criminal behavior related to problematic substance use, mental illness, chronic homelessness, poverty, and other health and wellness issues."

Howard County Police will now be able to divert an individual to comprehensive case management services and peer recovery support in lieu of the normal criminal justice system cycle. In the initial phases, LEAD will be implemented by Community Outreach Division and Neighborhood Community Resource Officers within HCPD. These officers are uniquely qualified to operate with a high-level of discretionary authority due to their extensive training and existing relationships within the communities they serve.

"We have seen great success with our youth diversion programs for many years and want to provide a similar restorative justice option to our adult population," said Police Chief Lisa Myers. "Our goal is to offer services that will best support each individual's needs, and that may

not always involve an arrest. The LEAD program will allow officers to provide an alternative that will address the root causes of criminal behavior.”

Prosecutors and police will work closely with case managers to ensure that all contacts with LEAD participants going forward, including new criminal prosecutions for other offenses, are coordinated with the service plan for the participant to maximize the opportunity to achieve behavioral change and reduce future criminal activity. The individual will receive a wide range of support services including, but not limited to, housing referrals, benefit navigation, linkage to primary care, mental health and recovery resources as well as job training.

“The LEAD Program, which is a multi-agency collaborative effort, spearheaded by our office, will provide Howard County with a socially and financially cost-effective alternative to the justice system,” said Howard County State’s Attorney Rich Gibson. “This is about helping people in need and avoiding long-lasting, negative consequences for individuals committing small-scale criminal offenses.”

This public safety initiative is a collaborative effort between the Office of the County Executive, Howard County Police Department, Howard County Health Department, Howard County State’s Attorney’s Office, Howard County Public Defender’s Office, Howard County Department of Corrections and Howard County Sheriff’s Office, all of whom signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) earlier this year.

"LEAD is a powerful tool for our behavioral health experts to use as Howard County Health Department continues its mission to provide accessible health services to everyone in our community," said Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura Rossman. "This program breaks down the silos between law enforcement, health services and government, and ensures that individuals receive the care and support required to address unmet behavioral health needs."

More than \$6.4 million in LEAD funding awarded through the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services supports the implementation of programs in 10 jurisdictions across Maryland. The Howard County Health Department (HCHD) has been awarded a 3-year grant totaling \$530,253 for their program.

"The LEAD program provides a trauma-informed approach to law enforcement for individuals experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis, while helping officers devote more time and resources to keeping dangerous violent criminals off our streets," said Glenn Fueston, the executive director of the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services.

"Our office is proud to collaborate on this initiative as another example of the comprehensive approach Governor Larry Hogan is taking to build a safer Maryland."

LEAD is an evidence-based systems approach that began in Seattle, WA in 2011. There are now 52 LEAD initiatives across the country with over 17 additional programs launching nationwide. Per the LEAD National Bureau, the program has reduced recidivism of its participants by 58% and has an average cost savings of around \$3,000 dollars for each participant in LEAD vs. the “system as usual” approach.

