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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Rachel Bryson, Communications Director
717.706.0001

Commissioners “Stepping Up” to Reduce Mentally Ill Incarcerations

Cumberland County, Pa. – The Cumberland County Board of Commissioners are “stepping up” to reduce the number of mentally ill people incarcerated. During their public meeting today, the Commissioners approved a resolution in support of the “Stepping Up Initiative,” a national effort which encourages communities to develop measurable action plans to reduce the incarceration rates of those with mental illness, in order to achieve positive impacts in local criminal justice systems.

“I appreciate that the Commissioners are supportive of the Criminal Justice Advisory Board’s (CJAB) efforts to effectively address the challenging issue of persons with mental illness that enter our justice system and end up in our jails,” said Rebekah Finkey, chair of the Cumberland County CJAB and Intermediate Punishment Programs manager. “The CJAB has worked for several years to identify ways in which we can reduce the number of seriously mentally ill individuals that are incarcerated, and improve the coordination of community and justice services to successfully integrate those whose crimes are a result of their illness back into the community. The Commissioners commitment in joining the “Stepping Up Initiative” will assist us in improving our current data collection efforts and utilizing that data to implement the most promising practices from across the country.”

Cumberland County is the 15th county in the Commonwealth to join the “Stepping Up Initiative.” The County completed a Mental Health and Justice Cross-Mapping exercise with the Pennsylvania Center of Excellence in September 2014. As a result, Cumberland County is in the process of implementing a Crisis Intervention Training program for local law enforcement and a Mental Health Court, which will primarily target pre-trial proceedings.

Statewide efforts with the “Stepping Up Initiative” aim to raise awareness of the public health crisis county jail systems are facing. Counties are encouraged to join the initiative, and share their data and data-driven strategies. These collaborative efforts will help counties expand plans to enhance diversion options, provide reentry assistance and connections to community-based treatment and housing. Improving these factors enables better coordination between the criminal justice system and treatment providers, ensuring individuals are receiving appropriate care and empowering them to experience a successful reentry.

An estimated two million people with serious mental illnesses are incarcerated annually across the United States. Once incarcerated, individuals with mental illnesses are more likely to remain longer in jail and are at greater risk of recidivism.

Pennsylvania's "Stepping Up Initiative" is led by a subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Mental Health and Justice Advisory Committee, including staff from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency, the Department of Human Services Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Task Force of CCAP, and others.

To learn more about the initiative visit <https://stepuptogether.org/>.

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