



NEWS



Local sheriffs want to end mental health transports

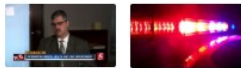
'We don't want to criminalize the needs of patients'

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By: Kelsey Gibbs



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NASHVILLE, Tenn (WTVF) — Depression, bi-polar, anxiety. Odds are you know someone suffering from a mental illness, but it's difficult when that person refuses to get help.

At times it can even mean calling police some wonder is that really the right thing to do.

Therapists, social workers, advocates and law enforcement all gathered in Nashville to attend the 2019 National Council for Behavioral Health Conference

“I think our law enforcement departments want to learn from our mental health professionals about how to do their job better,” said Patricia Costales.

Costales a licensed certified social worker traveled from Long Beach California to discuss how mental health providers and law enforcement can work together hand in hand.

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“I think more and more these days law enforcement is called upon too often to serve like therapists or social workers in the streets and in their jail systems,” Costales said.

It's a thought Dickson County Sheriff Jeff Bledsoe understands too well.

“We don't want to criminalize the needs of patients,” said Sheriff Bledsoe.

Sheriff Bledsoe is working with all Tennessee sheriff's departments to change the law.

“Sheriffs are given that authority or that demand to transport the mental health patients,” Bledsoe said

The law requires police officers to transport mentally ill patients to a treatment facility if they are a threat to themselves or others.

“It does put an extra burden on law enforcement and it's intimidating,” said Costales.

It's law in several states.

“Then we show up in all of a sudden, we have to use law enforcement that can sometime compound the problem because some people feel like they're not be treating properly.”

Sheriff Bledsoe says that responsibility can no longer fall on law enforcement.

“We're not the best option at this point,” he said.

Costales says in the end it should be what's best for the patient.

“If someone is having a crisis how we can get care services to them in a way that is safe for everyone involved but the least stigmatizing and traumatizing,” she said.

Davidson County is fighting a similar fight in keeping mental ill patients from ended up in jail.

In 2018, Sheriff Hall and mental health advocates announced the Davidson County Sheriff's Behavioral Care Center.

It will be adjacent to the Davidson County Sheriff's Office Downtown Detention Center, which is currently under construction. BCC staff will work to divert those arrested, and who meet the specified criteria, to a therapeutic environment in lieu of jail.

<https://www.newschannel5.com/news/local-sheriffs-want-to-end-mental-health-transports>