



May 2016

Dear Friends:

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and a good time to share with you the work that we are doing to address the needs of people with mental illness in Los Angeles County's criminal justice system.

A couple of years ago, I began a dialogue with a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the county. We shared a common concern about the inappropriateness of our jail serving as the nation's largest mental health ward. Together, we are seeking to find ways to divert people out of jail and into a more effective mental health system. We want to make sure that people with mental illness receive the treatment they need, so they don't keep cycling in and out of the criminal justice system.

We currently incarcerate people who have a mental illness in an effort to get them help – a very costly proposition that takes valuable resources away from other important public safety projects. As we have learned, this approach is inefficient, ineffective, and in many cases, inhumane.

My office is doing its part to make sure that change takes place. We have begun training law enforcement officers on how to safely de-escalate the situation with those who are mentally ill. We also are working with our criminal justice system partners to develop successful diversion programs.

I recently heard Paul Burke, executive director of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, talk about this issue. He said, "It's not a moment. It's a movement." Indeed, it's a movement that I am very proud as the District Attorney of the largest prosecutorial agency in the nation to lead.

Jackie Lacey
Los Angeles County District Attorney