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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 27, 2022

Norfolk County Sheriff Calls for Increased Federal Funding for Behavioral Health Care

DEDHAM, MA – Norfolk County Sheriff Patrick McDermott announced today that he has signed onto a letter from the National Association of Counties calling on federal lawmakers to pass additional behavioral health policies that would improve Norfolk County’s ability to provide comprehensive behavioral health services to residents. The letter notes that counties are often on the front line of addressing behavioral and mental health crises, including helping people with substance use disorder (SUD) and other serious issues.

“Our ability to provide the kind of care that residents need in order to live healthy and productive lives is directly impacted by the policies and funding provided by our federal government,” Sheriff McDermott said. “Norfolk County, like other counties, is often the first line of defense when dealing with mental and behavioral health issues. I am calling on Congress to do what is necessary and right to help us do our jobs better on behalf of the people we serve.”

Specifically, the letter asks that Congress help support behavioral and mental health treatment by better directing resources to community-based treatment and services in order to help support residents with behavioral health conditions and reduce the reliance on criminal legal services, including jails and prisons, which are one of the largest providers of behavioral health care.

“By appropriately funding and supporting the on-the-ground work we are providing to residents, we can make our communities safer and help people in crisis before they end up in the justice system,” added Sheriff McDermott.

The letter makes several specific requests to improve county behavioral health services, including:

- Amending the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP), which prohibits the use of federal funds, such as Medicaid, for medical care provided to “inmates of a public institution.” This policy, the letter notes, unfairly impacts jail facilities which disproportionately house people suffering from opioid use disorder and other conditions who are limited in their ability to access life-saving treatments such as

Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and other SUD treatments. Medicaid expansion would help justice-involved individuals, who are disproportionately low-income, to get the kinds of treatments that can help them both physically and socially;

- Repealing the Institutions for Mental Diseases exclusion, which prohibits federal reimbursement for care provided in psychiatric treatment facilities with more than 16 beds;
- Funding direct and flexible grant programs to support county efforts to recruit and train a sufficient behavioral healthcare workforce;
- Extending the temporary federal funding provided through the American Rescue Plan to support local crisis response infrastructure, such as the 988 national suicide prevention lifeline and other services;
- Enforcing the provisions of the 2008 Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and 2010 Affordable Care Act, which required most health plans to cover mental health and substance use disorder care and set comprehensive standards for equitable coverage of such care. The letter notes that several forms of insurance, such as Medicare, some state Medicaid programs, and Veterans Administration and short-term limited duration health care plans still place limitations on mental health coverage.

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