

Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **COUNTY JAIL WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR INMATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES Astorino Cites Efforts of Multiple Stakeholders to Reduce Recidivism**

Westchester County Executive Robert P. Astorino announced today that the county jail has received national recognition for its Community Oriented Re-Entry (CORE) program, which provides mental health services to inmates. Selected from more than 500 jails, prisons and other correctional facilities nationwide, Westchester's efforts won "Program of the Year" honors from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, a top accreditation group. The award will be presented on November 6, in Chicago.

"A lot of people talk about the importance of providing mental health services to people in jail," said Astorino. "This award recognizes that Westchester is delivering services with positive results."

The CORE program follows the key principles of Astorino's 'Safer Communities' initiative: address root causes and then marshal a coordinated response. Launched in November of 2014, CORE is a partnership among the county's Department of Correction, Department of Community Mental Health, and New York

Correct Care Solutions, the inmate health services provider at the jail. The program also relies upon several community partners who specialize in the needs of inmates with mental health issues, as well as from volunteers, such as clergy, musicians, artists and former prisoners committed to recovery.

Housed on the fourth floor of the jail, CORE provides intensive daily programs for inmate-patients who have been diagnosed with serious mental illnesses. CORE participants, which include men, women and minors, are screened by qualified mental health professionals and the jail's administrative team.

Emphasizing the principle that "discharge planning begins at intake," a key goal of CORE is to link inmate-patients with critical services in their home communities. CORE offers both individual and group-based therapy and focuses on improving participants' life skills, job readiness, family reintegration, spirituality and substance abuse recovery. Through the use of art and music therapy, guest speakers and other workshops, participants are able to discuss their fears, anxieties and other struggles in an interactive and productive manner not customarily seen in jail settings.

Several participants and facilitators spoke about the program, citing its honest and straight-forward approach, and how it deals with the mental, psychological and spiritual aspects of treatment and recovery.

"They don't treat me like a number," said Joe, an inmate who is participating in the program. "They treat me like an individual."

The benefits of the program have been two-fold: Fewer incidents inside the jail, such as fights and assaults on staff, and reduced recidivism outside.

"The reasons for CORE's success are easy to see," Astorino said. "Issues are addressed rather than ignored and relationships are created so that individuals leave the county jail with a network of experiences and services that will help them."

Astorino added: "For too long, far too many of our nation's jails and prisons have been filled with the people struggling with mental illness. The feedback we have received on CORE from everyone – from correction officers to inmates to mental health clinicians – has been truly remarkable. Ensuring that this population receives critically needed services while in jail directly enhances public safety when they return to their home communities, both in Westchester and beyond."

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