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Behavioral Health Diversion

Overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system has become a concern drawing nationwide attention. In response, a growing number of communities have been implementing behavioral health diversion programs as alternatives to conventional criminal justice case processing and incarceration. People with behavioral health needs who are involved with the criminal justice system are willingly redirected from traditional pathways to community-based treatment and support services. To help provide a conceptual framework for developing a continuum of opportunities, the CSG Justice Center released the [*Behavioral Health Diversion Interventions*](#) publication.

In an effort to promote diversion programs, the CSG Justice Center coordinated with the Judicial Council of California, County of Behavioral Health Directors Association, and California Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health to host an information and training session on January 30, 2020. Bringing together 44 judges, attorneys, social workers, directors of behavioral health departments, and probation services representatives from nine California counties, the *Mental Health Diversion: Making it Work Together* program presented participants with research fundamentals and case studies. It allowed them to learn through role playing, and engage in substantive regional discussions. A key resource for the training was a [judicial guide](#) offering practical considerations aimed at helping to recognize and redirect a defendant who might be suffering from a mental illness or substance use disorder. The guide was developed by the CSG Justice Center as part of its Judges and Psychiatrists Leadership Initiative.

The activities of the program produced several outcomes including the development of a shared definition of success related to local mental health



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diversion efforts, the establishment of a process for identifying and processing applications, identifying appropriate and available services for participants, and determining local next steps to advance diversion efforts.

Through funding from the California Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health, future training will be available for additional counties this spring. CSG West members interested in this topic are invited to attend the Public Safety Committee session held on July 29 during the CSG West Annual Meeting. The conversation will be educational and engaging.