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**Grant Initiates Investment in Multisystemic Therapies
for Families in Baltimore City**

*Evidence-based programs will prevent commitment, reduce recidivism,
and improve well-being among justice-involved young people*

Baltimore – The Department of Juvenile Services, through partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work’s [Institute for Innovation and Implementation](#) was awarded more than \$130,000 in grant funds to reduce existing community-based service gaps for youthful offenders in Baltimore City. Administered by the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, this grant provides startup resources for the Institute to facilitate selection and initial training of a provider for Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Multisystemic Therapy for Emerging Adults (MST-EA) in Baltimore City.

Together, MST and MST-EA will serve youth and young adults ages 12 to 20 years old, who are experiencing a wide range of needs. These community-based programs can be used as diversion programs at the front end of the juvenile justice system (e.g., at DJS Intake), as alternatives to commitment, and to support youth and families during the reentry process. Their multi-systemic approaches to behavior change addresses mental health (during therapy and through service linkages post-treatment), family engagement, workforce and educational needs, among other needs. Further, the MST framework offers a trauma-responsive approach to therapy, helping the young person and family to identify and address maladaptive behaviors related to traumatic experiences.

“The Department is excited to bring proven evidence-based therapy programs to Baltimore City,” said DJS Secretary Sam Abed. “These programs will not only help divert youth from entering the juvenile system, but also provide us with one more tool to reduce the racial disparities we face.”

Youth of color are disproportionately represented in Baltimore City’s juvenile justice system. This initiative will address racial and ethnic disparities by offering effective diversion opportunities for youth of color involved with the juvenile justice system. With MST and MST-EA as program options, the justice system will have evidence-based alternatives to court processing and out-of-home

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placements, offering a strategy to reduce the numbers and rates of youth petitioned and committed to DJS.

MST serves juvenile offenders ages 12 to 17 years old. Therapists work in the home, school, and community and are on call 24/7 to provide caregivers with the tools to transform the lives of troubled youth. MST provides caregivers with skills and resources to meet the challenges of raising teenagers and gives young people skills to cope with family, school, and neighborhood problems. MST interventions build on pre-existing strengths and aim for the following short-term outcomes: improve how the caregiver disciplines; enhance family relations; decrease a youth's association with negative peers; increase a youth's association with pro-social peers; improve a youth's school or vocational performance; engage youth in positive recreational outlets; and develop a natural support network of extended family, neighbors, and friends to help caregivers achieve and maintain changes.

MST is currently implemented in 15 countries and 34 states in the U.S., and in more than 30 years of research, it has consistently demonstrated positive outcomes with chronic juvenile offenders. MST generates more than a \$23 return on investment to taxpayers over the long-term for every \$1 funders invest in the service.

MST-EA is an adaptation of MST to serve an older, young adult population. It reduces recidivism and supports positive functioning in school, work, independent living, and relationships, while ensuring treatment and management of mental illness and any co-occurring substance use disorder. The clinical focus is on safety preservation, crisis management, establishment of natural supports, and increased life skills to support a youth's transition into adulthood. Social and family resources are integrated into treatment to promote a healthy natural support network for the client and to sustain treatment advances. Youth are treated for an average of 6 to 7 months as part of an interdisciplinary team and are also assigned a life coach to work with them. The life coach supports the young person with supplemental life skills, as well as vocational, educational, and social reinforcement needs, and provides additional months of aftercare.

"We are thrilled to support the implementation of high-quality, community-based programs that meet the needs of youth and families in Baltimore City," said Michelle Zabel, Director of UMSSW's Institute for Innovation and Implementation. "Through partnership with DJS, these proven interventions lay the groundwork for long-term success of youth and families. As with all our work, it is important that these efforts address systematic inequalities and racial disparities in our city."

The Institute is the MST Network Partner for Maryland, licensed by MST Services to conduct quality assurance and training for MST providers, funders, and stakeholders. The Institute will work with DJS to form an advisory team to engage potential partners who can guide the selection of a culturally competent and proven provider. The grant supports capacity building and MST/MST-EA training for the selected provider, with the goal of serving youth by Summer 2021.

For more information about Multisystemic Therapy in Maryland, please contact Jessie Watrous, Evidence-Based Program Director at the Institute, Jessie.Watrous@ssw.umaryland.edu.

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