

Response to Questions on the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisor Hudgins

Question: What would be the savings in terms of dollars and/or staff resources resulting from implementation of the Jail Diversion Program?

Response: The Jail Diversion program is expected to successfully divert 200 mentally ill persons and 1,000 persons drunk in public from arrest annually, with individuals instead being transported to hospitals, home, shelters, or detoxification centers for treatment. Although the program requires an increase of 7/7.0 SYE merit positions and two vehicles, there is no net cost to the County because the total cost of the program, \$779,000, will be fully absorbed by the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, Office of the Sheriff, and the Police Department in FY 2006. The agencies recognize the value and importance of the Jail Diversion program and have found flexibility within their budgets by reprioritizing previously planned services and programs.

The Jail Diversion program is valuable because it provides much-needed clinical treatment that otherwise might not be accessed by inmates, prevents inmates from entering a revolving-door cycle of repeat arrests for minor crimes, and results in a net cost savings to the County in terms of saved public safety resources. For example, persons with mental illness often deteriorate rapidly in a jail environment due to the stressors of crowding, noise, and the high rate of enforced withdrawal from alcohol and other drugs. Upon release from jail, many of these persons have no place to go. The County's limited public transportation system may preclude them from reaching a homeless shelter or mental health center and the cycle may begin again with a re-arrest for trespassing or public intoxication. Likewise, persons arrested for public intoxication are often processed into jail and later released onto the street without treatment and with the potential to re-offend.

It is estimated that of the average daily census of approximately 1,300 inmates in the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center (ADC), more than 200 experience serious mental illness. Maintaining non-violent persons with mental illness in jail is costly, in terms of costs associated with the Adult Detention Center, police time and the courts. For example, it costs \$125 per day per inmate at the ADC, and inmates with mental health problems have higher daily rates related to the need for specialized care and psychiatric medications. On average, an inmate with mental illness stays 120 days at a total expense of \$15,000 per incarceration, in contrast to a general population inmate who stays an average of 19 days at a cost of \$2,400. Thus, if an estimated 200 inmates with mental illness are diverted from jail into treatment, a potential savings of 66 annual ADC bed days could result. The much lengthier stay for an inmate with mental illness often is due to a lack of support system and no one to assist with bail or bonding, attorney requests for expensive and time-consuming psychological evaluations which they believe will assist with a client's defense, or greater difficulty of persons with mental illness to assist their attorneys in putting together a defense. In terms of public safety time savings, the Jail Diversion Program would allow a police officer to transfer custody of a person to another sworn officer posted at the treatment center, so that the officer could return to their

regular assignment as quickly as possible, rather than be tied up with one individual while a mental health screening is completed.

Of the 4,083 persons arrested by Fairfax County Police for being drunk in public in Calendar Year 2003, it is estimated that approximately 1,000 could have been diverted from arrest and transported to detoxification centers for treatment. Individuals not eligible for diversion include those with other warrants, those who are violent or uncooperative, and those who have committed other crimes. Additionally, individuals must voluntarily agree to diversion from arrest. The estimated public safety costs for processing cases of persons who could be diverted from arrest is \$734,940.