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## **JCOD's Rapid Diversion Program Shows Remarkable Success in Helping Individuals with Behavioral Health Challenges, New RAND Report Reveals**

**LOS ANGELES** – The Rapid Diversion Program (RDP), which diverts individuals with behavioral health needs into treatment before trial, has demonstrated significant success and shows great potential for further expansion with additional funding, according to a new RAND report released today.

The new report highlights an impressive outcome: 91% of individuals who successfully complete the program have avoided having a new criminal court case filed.

RDP is a unique collaboration between the Justice, Care and Opportunities Department (JCOD), the Public Defender and Alternate Public Defender offices, prosecutors, Los Angeles Superior Court, and clinical providers, creating a holistic approach to mental health in the justice system.

“The program has filled an essential gap in the spectrum of options for people in Los Angeles County with behavioral health concerns who are involved in the criminal legal system,” said Stephanie Brooks Holliday, lead author of the report and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND. “It’s a key strategy in addressing the overrepresentation

of individuals with mental illnesses in L.A. County's jail system."

The Rapid Diversion Program was developed to create opportunities to divert individuals with mental health or substance use disorders—whose conditions were a significant factor contributing to their criminal charges—away from jail and into treatment. Initially designed for individuals facing low-level, nonviolent misdemeanors, the program has since expanded to include both misdemeanor and felony charges.

Participants in the program receive mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment, as well as comprehensive case management services that help address additional needs such as transportation, housing, and access to benefits. Successful completion of the program results in dismissed charges, dramatically reducing barriers to housing and employment opportunities.

Before RDP's launch, mental health treatment options were primarily post-plea and focused on those with severe clinical needs or higher-level criminal charges. RDP changed that landscape by intervening earlier in the process, providing care when it's most impactful.

"By expanding the Rapid Diversion Program, we are not just rethinking justice for those with mental health challenges; we are creating pathways to healing, dignity, and lasting change," said Judge Songhai Armstead (ret.), Director of JCOD. "This program is a critical step toward breaking the cycle of recidivism and provides meaningful opportunities for recovery."

In January, JCOD's RDP celebrated a major milestone with its 2,000th diverted case.

Looking ahead, public defenders interviewed in the report expressed optimism that more individuals could benefit from diversion, with recommendations to broaden the range of charges eligible for RDP.

"The success we've seen so far is undeniable. These numbers represent real people who have been given another chance to rebuild their lives and address the underlying issues contributing to their involvement with the criminal legal system," said Ricardo García, the LA County Public Defender. "By expanding the range of charges eligible for diversion, we can help more people access the treatment and support they need."

RDP is currently operational in seven Los Angeles County courthouses: Airport Courthouse, Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center, Compton Courthouse, Governor George Deukmejian Courthouse, Michael Antonovich Antelope Valley Courthouse, Pasadena Courthouse, and Van Nuys Courthouse West.

However, RAND researchers recommended increasing funding to scale and expand RDP to additional courthouses, thereby widening access to treatment to more justice-involved individuals across Los Angeles County.

Support for this project and the RDP program are provided by JCOD, the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office, Los Angeles County Alternate Public Defender, Department of Mental Health, Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, Independent Defense Counsel's Office, Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, Special Services for Groups, Inc., Project 180, Exodus Recovery, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Center for Justice Innovation, and the Los Angeles Superior Court.

**The full report, "Process Evaluation of the Los Angeles County Rapid Diversion Program: A Pretrial Mental Health Diversion Program," is available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Other authors of the report include Elizabeth Marsolais and Samantha Matthews.**

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