Memorandum

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Date: July 10, 2008

To: Honorable Chairman Bruno A. Barreiro
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

HPSC
Agenda Item No:
7(G)

From: George M. Burgess
County Manager

Subject: Response to Directive Assignment from Commissioner Gimenez
Legistar # 081205

During the April 17, 2008 Health and Public Safety Committee meeting, Dr. E. Carolina Montoya, Mental Health Services Coordinator, stated that currently nearly 20% of the County's in-jail population is in need of psychiatric intervention. She also indicated that this figure is probably an under-representation of the actual number of mentally-disordered individuals in the correctional system, and that the percentage of mentally illness in the inmate population is very disproportionate to the incidence in the general population.

In response to these figures, Commissioner Gimenez questioned whether the rates were comparable to other jurisdictions and requested that a report be prepared which reflects the number of inmates with mental health illness in Miami-Dade County compared to other jurisdictions. He asked that the report specify the percentage of mental health-disordered inmates who are homeless, and Committee Chairman Moss asked that the report specify how the data were derived.

It is difficult to accurately determine the number of inmates with mental health disorders in the criminal justice system, due to the fact that many mental health disorders are undetected as inmates enter the system because the symptoms are not observed, are unreported, or are denied by the individual. There is also a degree of subjectivity in the detection of symptoms related to mental illness and their severity, with correctional staff focusing on the presence of "acute" psychiatric episodes. The criminal justice environment also presents certain "distress" factors which make the detection of mental health symptoms troublesome to ascertain.

In Miami-Dade County, the identification of mental health issues in an individual begins with the police officer at the time of arrest and continues with screening efforts by both the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation staff and the medical staff of Correctional Health Services. Although specific questionnaires are utilized, there is still a great margin for an active mental health disorder to be undetermined. The general consensus is that the incidence of mental health disorders is less than accurate and underreported. Recently, efforts have been initiated to re-evaluate the process of mental health disorder identification. As this process continues, consideration will be given to possible alternatives which are likely to increase the valid identification of the problems.

In an effort to respond to Commissioner Gimenez's specific questions, information was requested from the Florida correctional system community. The chart below presents the information received from six counties and includes Miami-Dade County for comparison. These figures reflect the number of inmates in county facilities identified as having a mental disorder and in need of psychiatric intervention/medication compared to the total number of inmates.

County	Average Daily Population	# on Psychiatric Medications	% on Psychiatric Medications
Broward	5,314	1,325	25%
Highlands	480	86	18%
Miami-Dade	7,100	1,191	17%
Okaloosa	657	64	10%
Palm Beach	3,000	748	25%
St. Lucie	1,540	300	19%
Volusia	1,370	350	26%

The information indicates that the percentage of inmates in correctional systems identified as having a mental health disorder ranges from 10% to 26%. If the lowest rate, in Okaloosa County, were removed, the percentages would all be within the close range of 17% to 26%. Given these figures, Miami-Dade County's percentage (17%) is actually on the low end of the range. In further support of these figures, the Florida Fact Sheet, prepared by the Council of State Governments' Justice Center in 2006, cites a Department of Children and Families report that up to 23% of county jail inmates experience serious mental illness.

On the issue of homelessness among the mentally-disordered inmates, this information is not captured by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. However, based on information obtained from the Administrative Office of the Courts, the estimated rate of homelessness among misdemeanor diversion participants is typically between 50% and 55%. Additionally, according to the Homeless Trust, 46% of the homeless population has been in jail at some point. They also cite 45% of the homeless population as having a mental illness.

As a whole, the rates of mental illness among the in-jail population appear to be comparable to rates in Miami-Dade County. The articles cited below, however, also speak to rates in state and federal prisons, a population which is not identical to the county jail population.

- The 1998 article by Lamb and Weinberger is by far the most often cited in association with estimates of mental illness in jails and prisons and references studies generally considered to be the best information to date. This review places city/county jail mental illness prevalence estimates (for both men and women) to be between 6% and 15%.

  The article estimates homelessness among inmates with mental illness at 40% to 50%, with misdemeanants more likely to be homeless than felons. This article cites 1992 research in New York City which found that 43% of the arrestees with mental illness were homeless at the time of arrest.

- A 1999 report by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that 16% of jail inmates have a mental illness. More than 50% of mentally ill arrestees reported being under the influence at the time of the offense, and 56% reported drug use the month prior to their arrest.

  This report stated that 30% of the mentally ill inmates in jail were homeless during the year preceding their arrest.

- A follow-up article by Lamb and Weinberger (2005) placed the estimates of serious and persistent mental illness (diagnoses of schizophrenia, major depression and bipolar disorder) among the jail and prison population from 16% to 24%.

- Veysey and Bichler-Robertson (2005) estimated prevalence rates for specific psychiatric diagnoses. This research estimates the diagnoses of severe and persistent mental illness (i.e., schizophrenia, major depression and bipolar disorder) among the jail population at the time of booking to be from 8% to 18%.

- A 2006 report by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics stated that 64% or 479,900 jail inmates had a mental health problem (history of disorder or active symptoms). 43% jail inmates reported active symptoms. Of those with a mental health disorder, 76% also met criteria for a co-occurring substance abuse disorder.

  This report indicated that 17% of the jail inmates who had a mental health problem had been homeless in the year before the incarceration.

In summary, the estimate of severe and persistent mental illness requiring psychiatric intervention in the Miami-Dade County jail population is fairly consistent with figures from other Florida counties. Although the review of articles regarding the issue at a national level yielded a broader range of findings, the County's mental illness rate in the jail remains fairly consistent. The rate of homelessness among the mentally ill jail population is not specifically known; however, from available collateral information, it would appear reasonable to estimate that 30% to 50% of mentally-disordered inmates are homeless.

Please contact Dr. Montoya at (305) 375-1646 for additional information.

c: Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor
Denis Morales, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Timothy P. Ryan, Director, Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Dept.
Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor