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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Community event to recognize efforts in reducing number  
of people with mental illnesses in Douglas County Correctional Facility**

**LAWRENCE, KS** – Douglas County and partner agencies will host an event May 14 to recognize the community collaboration and work that has been accomplished to significantly reduce the number of people with serious mental illnesses in the Douglas County Correctional Facility. It will be 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 14, at the Cider Gallery, 810 Pennsylvania St., and is being held in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness Month and Stepping Up Month of Action.

The event will include recognition from the National Association of Counties, American Psychiatric Association Foundation, and Council of State Governments Justice Center followed by a panel discussion about community efforts and next steps. Panelists include: Charles Branson, Douglas County District Attorney; Sgt. Ryan Halsted, Lawrence Police Department; The Honorable Sally Pokorny, 7th Judicial District Judge; Nicole Rials, Director of Urgent Care Programs, Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center; and Bob Tryanski, Director of Behavioral Health Projects for Douglas County.

Since joining the Stepping Up initiative in October 2015, Douglas County has reduced the number of people with serious mental illnesses who are booked into the Douglas County Correctional Facility by 56 percent. In 2014, 18 percent of those in the Correctional Facility were identified as having a serious mental illness, and in 2018, the percentage was 8 percent. The national average is 17 percent.

Stepping Up is a national initiative to mobilize local and state leaders to reduce the number of people who have serious mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. Stepping Up was launched by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Association of Counties (NACo), and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APA Foundation).

In June 2018, Douglas County launched an intensive data-driven review with The CSG Justice Center to better achieve a system-wide impact on this population. Douglas County was also named one of seven Stepping Up Innovator Counties in the country in recognition of its efforts to identify people with mental illnesses in the Correctional Facility and consistently collect data on them.

“Douglas County is demonstrating today why the Stepping Up initiative designated it as an ‘Innovator County’ last year. They’re not only innovating, they’re showing that innovation yields impressive, concrete results,” said Megan Quattlebaum, director of the CSG Justice Center. “We’re proud that Douglas County officials have benefitted from their work with our organization and the Stepping Up initiative. We look forward to continuing to partner with Douglas to achieve positive outcomes for people who are mentally ill and involved in the criminal justice system. Douglas’s story is one from which other counties can draw lessons and inspiration.”

Working in partnership with the University of Kansas and Huskey and Associates, nationally-recognized juvenile justice consultants, Douglas County first established accurate baseline numbers of people with mental illnesses coming into the Correctional Facility in 2014, laying the groundwork for other changes to come.

In conjunction with Stepping Up, Douglas County has implemented a number of programs and policies to help them achieve their overall goal. These include: establishing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, hiring a Criminal Justice Coordinator, hiring a Criminal Justice Data Analyst, hiring a Director of Behavioral Health Projects, integrating the Brief Jail Mental Health Screen into its jail system, implementing the Assess-Identify-Divert (AID) program, funding a behavioral health court, and starting a pretrial release program.

“The reduction cannot be contributed to one or two initiatives, but to the whole of the effort to change the culture of the criminal justice system through data sharing and collaboration,” said Criminal Justice Coordinator Robert Bieniecki. “This has led to better outcomes through improved care coordination and reduced stigma.”

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