



Montana Legislative Services Division
Legal Services Office

TO: Law and Justice Interim Committee

FROM: David S. Niss, Staff Attorney

RE: No. 2 - Data on provision of mental health services and suicide prevention
in county Jails

DATE: June 13, 2008

I
INTRODUCTION

Before the convening of the Law and Justice Interim Committee (LJIC) on April 11, 2008, LJIC staff wrote to the Montana Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (MSPOA) and the Montana Association of Counties (MACO) asking 19 questions concerning the provision of mental health services and concerning suicides in county jails (copies of the letters were distributed by LJIC staff at the April 11 meeting and are attached). Because no data was received from these organizations indicating that the requested data was available, the LJIC asked the LJIC staff to look elsewhere for the information. The results of that search for that information are contained in this memorandum, including the results of a recent survey undertaken by the MSPOA for the LJIC.

II
DISCUSSION

a. Data on mental health treatment in county jails

In order to determine whether any Montana public or private entity collects the type of data previously requested of the MSPOA and MACO, the LJIC staff contacted the Board of Crime Control, the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), the Governor's mental health ombudsman, the Department of Corrections, and several private health care associations, such as the Montana Psychiatric Association, the Montana Psychological Association, the Montana Counseling Association, the Montana Suicide Prevention Program, and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Montana. With some limited exceptions, none of the public or private entities contacted kept data on mental health treatment in county jails. LJIC staff therefore requested that the MSPOA poll its membership using a standard format of questions (see part IId below).

b. Data on suicides in county jails

The Office of Vital Statistics of the DPHHS does have data showing the number of deaths in county jails reported as suicides. That information is obtained by that office because of the provisions of 50-15-403, MCA, requiring death certificates to be filed with the DPHHS. The death certificates show the place and cause of death. Those records show that for the 5-year period of 2003 through 2007, there were 14 suicides in county jails, or 2.9 suicides a year. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, a part of the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ), also keeps data on the number of suicides in jails. According to the information provided at the July 11 meeting by Ms. Patty Jacques, the Bureau of Justice Statistics data for the 5-year period from 2001 through 2005 shows that a total of 15 suicides occurred, giving a rate of 3 suicides a year.

c. Data on attempted suicides in county jails

The only figures that LJIC staff could locate showing attempted suicides in county jails were the figures reported by the Montana Advocacy Program, now Disability Rights Montana, as a result of a voluntary survey of County Sheriffs conducted in 1999 and 2000 in 22 counties. After 5 months, 15 of the 22 counties had responded to the survey.¹ That survey showed that about two-thirds of the responding facilities had had one or more suicide attempts in the time period covered by the voluntary survey.²

d. MSPOA survey

After the April 11, 2008, LJIC meeting, LJIC staff discussed with the MSPOA the possibility of conducting a survey of the MSPOA membership on issues related to mental health treatment and suicide prevention in county jails. The MSPOA offered to conduct the survey, using questions provided by LJIC staff, with MSPOA resources. The survey was sent approximately May 27 to the 45 counties having jails, and the faxed results of the survey were delivered to the LJIC staff on June 10. A copy of the survey showing the questions posed and the number of positive and negative replies to each question is attached. The last question in the survey asked how many county prisoners each month or year were "considered by the detention staff to be at risk for suicide" and the average daily population of the jail (some counties responded with a figure for a particular month or year). The responses are tallied below (individual survey

¹Treatment of Persons with Mental Illness in Montana Jails: A Report by the Montana Advocacy Program (September 2000), p. 7.

Id., pp. 27, 48.

responses are on file in LJIC staff offices) (if a numerical range was given, or more or less than a month/year was reported, LJIC staff has averaged the figures):

Anaconda/Deer Lodge County: 15 a year, 20 ADP

Beaverhead County: 2 a month, 5 ADP

Broadwater County: 3 a year, 30 ADP

Butte/Silver Bow: 11.7 a month, 53 ADP

Cascade County: 104 a year, 385 ADP

Fergus County: 2 a year, 15 ADP

Gallatin County: 4 a month; 49 a year, 80 ADP

Glacier County: 6 a year, 10 ADP

Lewis and Clark County: 13 a year, 67.3 ADP

Mineral County: 5 a year, 16 ADP

Missoula County: ? a month, 330 ADP

Powder River County: 0 a year, .5 ADP

Richland County: 1 a month, 6.74 ADP

Rosebud County: 1.5 a month, 17 ADP

Sanders County: 2 a month, 21 ADP

Sweet Grass County: 0 a month, 2 ADP

Valley County: 30 a year, 12 ADP

Yellowstone County: 15 a month, 349 ADP

III CONCLUSION

The DPHHS maintains records showing the number of deaths in county jails reported as suicides. The records show that 2.9 suicides were committed annually in county jails for

the period 2003 through 2007. This information is in approximate agreement with the number of suicide reported to the USDOJ for the years 2001 through 2005, which was three suicides a year. No data is available on a statewide basis showing how many attempted suicides there are in county jails, except as provided in a dated report by Disability Rights Montana, or explaining how counties provide mental health services to prisoners in county jails, except as provided in a recent survey conducted by the MSPOA and reported in this memorandum.

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**No. 2 - Mental Health/Suicide Data
Executive Bullets**

- * With the exception of the suicide data kept by the DPHHS on suicides in county jails, LJIC staff has been unable to locate any meaningful data concerning the provision of prisoners with mental health services in county jails. The data kept by the DPHHS shows approximately 2.9 jail suicides occurring in Montana every year.

- * The MSPOA conducted a survey of its membership concerning certain mental health and jail suicide issues. The results of that survey are reported in the attached memorandum.