

Nova Southeastern University: Public Health Law Summit  
Problem Solving Justice, Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Public Safety  
A White Paper

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One may ask the question: why a public health law summit to discuss the challenges and objectives of reducing recidivism and breaking arrest cycles? Why are we not simply labeling this a criminal justice summit? The answer, of course, underscores a forensic population which is characterized by a complex set of social and public health disparities which have plagued a system, historically ill equipped to respond to these challenges. The scholarly theory of [Therapeutic Jurisprudence](#) (TJ), developed by the late Professor Bruce A. Winick, University of Miami School of Law, and David Wexler, University of Arizona Rogers College of Law and University of Puerto Rico, envisioned a legal theory which represents both a field of empirical study and a highly portable legal philosophy with roots in mental health and public health law.<sup>1</sup> Since the first problem solving Drug Court in 1989, TJ has provided countless courts and legal actors; a meaningful opportunity to re-align traditional court process with the goal of resolving vexing social problems. Through a TJ lens, problem solving courts have the potential to heal through empathic connectivity and targeted court orders designed to creatively seek solutions typically in a public health context to overcome barriers to care which often exist where fragmentation and scarcity of resources are essentially inaccessible.<sup>2</sup> Presently, TJ has been embraced by judges, lawyers and law enforcement in the U.S. and across the globe. Its popularity and evidence base so positive and robust, it is fair to say that the emergence and dynamic growth of TJ can be reasonably described as a revolutionary innovation in public health law.<sup>3</sup>

During the past several decades, the theory of Therapeutic Jurisprudence TJ has led to the ultra-rapid growth and evolution of the criminal justice system with the emergence of problem solving courts.<sup>4</sup> The belief that courts could act as a therapeutic agent when legal actors (i.e. judges and lawyers) align process, behavior and take a multi-disciplinary approach to the legal proceedings and decision - making through the integration of various components of public health law (e.g. mental health, substance abuse, health disparities, and community based systems of care, system organization, forensic psychology, public policy, homelessness, the impact of illiteracy and educational deficits, poverty, trauma and violence, governmental benefits systems and countless regulatory schemes, principles of psychiatric and developmental rehabilitation, civil rights, human rights, ethics and the technologies of social justice advocacy) have the ability to improve court experience and has drastically redefined jurisprudence in the U.S. and globally.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See David B. Wexler, *International Network on Therapeutic Jurisprudence*, available at <http://www.law.arizona.edu/depts/upr-intj/> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

For those of you who practice in criminal justice (which includes the juvenile justice system) or are planning to go into criminal justice, this area of the law must be understood. It represents a major legal paradigm shift where inter-disciplinary public health becomes an area where constant learning persists at a fast and furious pace. For me, it is almost impossible to recall a time when matters of mental health, substance abuse, addiction and recovery, restorative sentencing and Therapeutic Jurisprudence TJ have not played a major role in daily considerations of court process. This cross-cutting analytical matrix is consistently applied and part of on-going decision making processes.

Therefore, it is with this recognition and ever evolving criminal justice system consciousness that NSU Law Center, together with its collaborative partners, Broward Sheriff's Office and Office of NSU Faculty Alumni, host this unique Public Health Law Summit. Through this Summit we chart the evolution of problem solving justice, through its early history and legal pioneers, the proliferation of the diverse application of problem solving courts and related strategies throughout the years and the sustaining power of community collaborations. This revolutionary paradigm has raised the specter of complex social and criminal justice problem solving and law enforcement to a sophisticated art form. Recently, in my court, a municipal prosecutor was wrestling with a rather elegant, but eccentric woman who insisted on living in her urban camper in front of a major retail store. This former flight attendant was delightful, albeit stubborn, intellectually sound, deemed psychiatrically stable. Yet, as my mental health court clinician stated, "A bit of a hippie throwback". During the course of the hearing, the prosecutor insisted she was not capable of exploring what housing relief funds and other resources her city may have available to assist this woman and declared: "Judge, I am not a social worker!" My reply: "Counsel, of course you are." "We all are." A comment intended to imply social work is noble and in my view, a core function of problem solving justice.

We all hear of the success and extraordinary outcomes problem solving courts have enjoyed throughout the years. The needle however, keeps moving and so do the challenges. Every State, including Florida, is struggling with how to reduce the crushing costs of incarceration, which hit its fever pitch in 2008 with the groundbreaking PEW report of mass incarceration in the US: [1:100 Behind Bars in America](#).<sup>6</sup> Since the publication of this research survey and PEW's subsequent public safety project series, all States, together with elected officials, law enforcement, major public policy research centers on all levels of government have been working to reduce this unsustainable trend and develop criminal justice strategies which are targeted, evidence based public safety focused. Strategies which will reduce those disparities driving the high costs of recidivism, and restore lives.

As a matter of economic cost drivers, correctional administrators have focused on the rate of recidivism as being one of the core measures of the spiraling growth of corrections budgets.<sup>7</sup> As part of this summit's mission and theory, we look to strengthen our community resolve, solidarity and collaborative spirit in seeking problem solving justice strategies to our legal, law

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<sup>6</sup> The PEW Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, PEWTRUSTS.ORG , Feb. 2008, available at

[http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/sentencing\\_and\\_corrections/one\\_in\\_100.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/sentencing_and_corrections/one_in_100.pdf) (last visited July 16, 2013) [hereinafter PEW Report].

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

enforcement and public health community stakeholders in an effort to help promote public safety, public health and quality of life for all of Broward's citizens.

### The Meaning of Public Health Law

Public health law and social justice defy a simple definition. For many in the legal and criminal justice arenas, these concepts or sectors may seem highly abstract and somewhat amorphous. Georgetown University Law Professor, Lawrence O. Gostin, does an excellent job of defining for us the definition and theory of Public Health law. He states:

*Public health law is the study of the legal powers and duties of the state, in collaboration with its partners (e.g. health care, business, and community, the media, and academia), to ensure the conditions for people to be healthy (to identify, prevent, and ameliorate risks, to health in the population), and of the limitations on the power of the state to constrain the common good the autonomy, privacy, liberty, propriety, and other legally protected interests of individuals. The prime objective of public health is to pursue the highest possible level of physical and mental health in the population, consistent with the values of social justice.*<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, matters of public health and the criminal law remained fairly distant and distinct disciplines. Traditionally, only to intersect at limited and specific phases of a criminal prosecution, examples lie in certain due process considerations, including legal competency to proceed to trial and the insanity defense. Other examples exist in affirmative defenses and/or factors pertaining to sentencing mitigation, such as mental health implications and the impact of extreme trauma of domestic violence victims, known as The Battered Women's Syndrome.

This psychological syndrome was first introduced in a court of law by NSU's own, Dr. Lenore Walker of the Center for Psychological Studies. Note, Dr Walker is hailed as the mother of The Battered Women's Syndrome and theories behind the Cycle of Violence. Dr. Walker will be an invited panelist, speaking on why it is significant to integrate the general understanding of the impact of unresolved trauma into problem solving court process and messaging. ([Click here](#) to download a copy of the article on The Battered Woman Syndrome: History of Domestic Violence and the Law, by Walker, Lenore E., Duros, Rachel I., & Tome, Allison).

As to the criminal justice system and corrections generally, matters of public health rested largely, on matters of constitutional protections related to the delivery of medical care and treatment within penal institutions and standards of care.<sup>9</sup> The Supreme Court establishing the principle that "deliberate failure" of prison authorities to respond to the medical needs of an inmate "constitutes cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Lawrence O. Gostin, *A Theory and Definition of Public Health Law*, available at <http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1091&context=facpub> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> See *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 104-05; See also *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 35 (1993) (establishing a theory of action based upon "deliberate indifference" under the Eighth Amendment).

## Court Innovation: The Early History of (TJ) Problem Solving Courts

In the late, 1980's, ironically, in the State of Florida (Miami), it would be two law professors, the late Professor, Bruce A. Winick and David Wexler, seeking to improve and essentially ease the often traumatic mental health civil court process for individuals subject to involuntary civil commitment proceedings, held the key to the next big idea in law reform.<sup>11</sup> Therapeutic Jurisprudence (TJ), an interdisciplinary and scholarly study of how legal process, procedures and a change in behavior of legal actors (i.e. judges and lawyers) could change the court experience from one of anti-therapeutic to one of healing, was delivered in a paper to the National Institute on Mental Health in 1987.

Within two years, with the establishment of the first problem solving drug court in the United States (1989), the marriage of public health law to criminal justice was sealed. For the first time in the criminal justice sphere, a courageous Prosecutor and former U.S. Attorney General, Janet Reno and public defenders, in Dade County, would have a legitimate public health/legal oriented strategy to re-structure the ways traditional courts function in order to break arrest cycles. The Drug Court's goal was to incentivize treatment by offering dismissal of charges upon completion of court ordered and monitored drug treatment programming. Therapeutic Jurisprudence (TJ) would also be the fuel that launched the first mental health court in the United States, a court innovation to combat the tragic trend of the criminalization of the mentally ill (1997), with its core strategy based in diversion and shifting those in need of psychiatric treatment to stabilization units in the community or community based care, depending on the psychiatric status and needs of the individual appearing in a clinically-staffed court.

This effort was born here in Broward County and led by a collaborative mental health/criminal justice task force. With exceptional leadership and dedication by Circuit Judge Marc Speiser, Broward Public Defender Howard Finkelstein, BSO, Michael Satz, Broward County State Attorney, and included many of our NAMI advocates, major community treatment providers and local social service administrators. This dedicated group ultimately settled on a specialized and centralized court model, administrated by County Judge Ginger Lerner-Wren. The Broward Mental Health Court was a model for Federal Legislation in 2000 and stands as a fixture in the problem solving court history.<sup>12</sup>

Since that time, the problem solving court movement, together with therapeutic jurisprudence at its philosophical core, has sprinted across the criminal justice system, driving local communities to solve vexing social problems, including courts as varied as the diverse public health problems they seek to solve. Examples include Veteran's Courts, High Risk Domestic Violence Courts, Teen Courts, Youth Courts, Juvenile Drug and Mental Health Courts, Dependency Drug Courts, Smoking Courts, Community Courts, Girl's Courts (Hawaii), the new Gambling Court in New York.

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<sup>11</sup> See generally David B. Wexler, *International Network on Therapeutic Jurisprudence*, available at <http://www.law.arizona.edu/depts/upr-intj/>, (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> See Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act, PL 108-414, 108<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2004).

The Problem Solving Justice movement spans the criminal justice spectrum and has spawned, pre-booking diversionary programs and post-sentencing Reentry Courts and ancillary community probation reentry services. In addition, many community based systems of care have joined the movement with juvenile justice involved programming. The best known program, perhaps, The Harvard Government award winning model, [Wraparound Milwaukee](#).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, ultra-creative collaborations have now breached the legal system and crossed over to the education system, with the creation of the innovative and award winning charter school, [The Innovative Academy](#)<sup>14</sup> was spearheaded by Circuit (Juvenile) Judge, Jimmie Edwards, of Saint Louis, Missouri.

### The U.S. and Florida Criminal Justice Challenge

The groundbreaking policy report issued by the PEW Center in 2008 told the story of a nation's incarceration rate, which had bypassed every other country on earth.<sup>15</sup> Data included the fact that more than two million people in America are incarcerated, and one man out of eighteen is behind bars or on some type of community corrections supervision.<sup>16</sup> The United States is spending an estimated \$60 + billion on costs of incarceration, as opposed to education, social services and economic development.<sup>17</sup> Further, all major policy research centers concur with the data, that more than two-thirds of individuals incarcerated are non-violent and impacted by a number of complex public health problems, including a mental illness and addictive disorders, together with a broad range of chronic medical problems, including, cancer, asthma, Hepatitis C, TB, diabetes, cardiac disease, HIV/AIDS and STD's.

In regards to those individuals with serious mental illness, Human Rights Watch in 2003 released its special report on the abuse and neglect of inmates with mental illness, [Ill Equipped: U.S. Prisons and Offenders with Mental Illness](#).<sup>18</sup> The report concluded that not only have U.S. prisons, long known for serving as our country's largest de facto psychiatric hospitals, but are in fact systemically neglecting the care and treatment of those with serious mental illness being held in many U.S. super-max prisons.<sup>19</sup> Note: HRW attorney, Jamie Fellner, observed Broward's Mental Health Court and included the Court in its *Special Report* as a specific strategic recommendation to intervene and prevent further escalation of inmates with mental illness into the prison system.<sup>20</sup>

Note, the overwhelming negative social and economic impact of incarceration on individuals, families, and communities affected by incarceration and the ability to climb out of poverty and move up the economic mobility ladder, is deemed outside the subject matter of this particular summit. Yet, the exponential public health costs and implications to the State, have been framed by RAND Corporation, in its 2011 survey, [Understanding the Public Health Implications of](#)

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<sup>13</sup> Available at <http://county.milwaukee.gov/WraparoundMilwaukee.htm> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Available at <http://commons.trincoll.edu/edreform/2013/05/stopping-traffic-keeping-kids-out-of-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> PEW Report, *supra* note 6

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/usa1003/usa1003.pdf> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

[Prisoner Reentry in California](#).<sup>21</sup> See also The Pew Center's 2010 report, [Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Upward Mobility](#).<sup>22</sup>

Although the State of Florida did not choose to participate in the 2008 PEW Center State Survey on incarceration and presented no data, Florida's Department of Corrections took affirmative action in 2008 to develop a coordinated system approach to prisoner reentry. This included a five (5) year strategic plan with definitive recommendations to target the high rate of Florida's recidivism, which was reported as in excess of 70 percent of former offenders returning to prison within three (3) years of their release (See 2010 Florida Department of Corrections (DOC) Prisons Reentry Advisory Council Report<sup>23</sup> - note: this data does is not inclusive of local jails). Some basic data based on review of the Florida DOC report and related policy reports:<sup>24</sup>

- Eighty-eight percent of all inmates in Florida will eventually be released.
- On June 30, 2010, there were 102232 persons incarcerated in the State of Florida.
- Between 2009 and 2010, 36463 inmates completed their sentences and released back to their communities. An estimated one-third is projected to return to prison within three years.
- On July 31, 2010, 152182 offenders were under community control supervision.
- During 2008 and 2009, 17023 community supervision releases were revoked due to a new offense.
- 1995 OPPAGA Report noted that "Most of Florida's prison population was due to re-incarceration rather than offenders entering for the first time. "
- Report concludes that effective reentry is the key to reducing recidivism.
- Florida's public health challenges mirror the national data including the need for mental health and substance abuse treatment, interventions.
- Florida's jail and prison populations suffer from a wide range of chronic medical problems including (cancer, asthma, diabetes, hepatitis B, TB, HIV/AIDS and STD's and cardiac disease and hypertension).
- Florida's jails and prisons have long been documented as serving as de facto psychiatric hospitals.

The promising news is that the Florida's Legislature has recently passed an early release bill that would allow for early release of prisoners held for non-violent offenses. The bill creates a new law that requires DOC to develop a reentry program designed to allow non-violent offenders to have their sentences reduced through participation in intensive substance abuse treatment, general education, vocational training and executive decision making skills training. Broward Sheriff's Office, Community Supervision Director, David Scharf will be updating us on this legislation and local programmatic reentry planning objectives.

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<sup>21</sup> Available at [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND\\_MG1165.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1165.pdf) (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Available at

[http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Economic\\_Mobility/Collateral%20Costs%20FI%20NAL.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Economic_Mobility/Collateral%20Costs%20FI%20NAL.pdf) (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/orginfo/reentry/CouncilReport2010.pdf> (last visited July 16, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

## The Power of the Community Collaborative

It is clear that Broward County and the State of Florida face severe public health system challenges to meet the promise of the new legislation. This White Paper tracks the great evolution of problem solving courts which paved the way for explosive proliferation of problem solving justice strategies through the integration of diverse public health disciplines and evidence based research and structural system advances. The origins of this revolutionary movement being here in South Florida, through the culmination of visionary and courageous leaders in the law, academia, criminal justice, law enforcement, and public health . Together, with NSU and a shared vision with a deep commitment to the advancement of quality of life and public safety for our community, it is our hope that this public health law summit helps galvanize our legal, law enforcement, and public health leaders to meet our new challenges with the best evidence and spearhead new initiatives, to work strategically and smart to move this new legislation forward with improved public safety and public health for our entire community.