

# STATE OF COLORADO

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John W. Hickenlooper  
Governor

July 25, 2016

National Governors' Association

Re: Criminal Justice Reform Project Letter of Interest for October Summit

Dear Mr. Locke:

Colorado is very excited to submit this letter of interest for participation in the October, 2016, state summit for the National Criminal Justice Reform Project. The key areas of interest for our state are topic #5, Information Sharing and Data Integration and topic #3, Mental Health and Substance Abuse. Both topics are current areas of focus and ongoing work. It is our hope that participating in the state summit and the opportunity for ongoing technical assistance and training will add significant value to the work we've already begun.

## CORE TEAM MEMBERS

For the October summit, Colorado's core team members would be Adrienne Russman, the Governor's Criminal Justice Policy Advisor, Jeanne Smith, the State Administering Agency, Stan Hilkey, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Public Safety and chair of the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice and chair of the Colorado Integrated Criminal Justice Information System governing body, and Doug Wilson, Colorado State Public Defender.

The Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) is a legislatively-mandated statewide study group composed of representatives from state agencies, local governments, law enforcement, prosecution, defense, and treatment professionals around the state, whose purpose is to review policies and practices and make recommendations related to criminal and juvenile justice legislation and business practice changes. CCJJ has reviewed this project and endorses this letter of interest.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

Though Colorado has made it a priority to improve results for our clients through the increased use of evidence-based programming, smarter use of data to drive budget and policy decisions, and outcomes-driven strategic planning, certain challenges remain.

We know that individuals with behavioral health issues are overrepresented in our criminal justice system and we must do a better job meeting their needs or else we will continue to see

them return to our jails and prisons time and again. We also know that we must improve reentry success for offenders in the community, particularly for those with a behavioral health diagnoses, from corrections to community corrections to parole and reentry.

Central to the issue of providing better treatment, services, and continuity of care both with regard to behavioral health clients, as well as more broadly in our criminal justice system, is the need for better data sharing systems, performance and outcome metrics, and high quality evaluation of our programs and practices.

In 2014, we brought the Pew Results First Initiative to Colorado to collect data relating to the use of evidence-based practices in the criminal justice system and other areas of state government to better analyze the cost-benefit ratios of those practices and help guide future policy and budget decisions regarding what works. During this study it became clear that our state's current analysis and reporting capabilities are not robust enough to make full use of the enormous amount of data that state agencies collect in order to fully inform policy-makers.

## CURRENT WORK ON DATA SHARING AND MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION SHARING

In 2015, the CCJJ identified the need for broader information-sharing as a priority concern, and focus groups were conducted with practitioners around the state to identify gaps in information that hamper case planning for successful offender management, treatment, and reentry. One of the identified gaps was the lack of centralized access to local information, including municipal courts and county jails. A Commission task force has begun outreach to those entities to establish partnerships for further work.

The CCJJ is also pursuing a study of the need for better options for persons with mental illness who are frequent users of services in local jails and community mental health centers. A task force of the Commission was created in early 2016 to review a number of aspects of treatment, including the need for improved information sharing between jails and mental health centers. The lack of consistent data collection for jail populations around the state to provide an accurate view of the nature of that population has arisen as a major issue.

At the same time, Adams County, has been developing a county-wide information sharing platform through the work of its Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. This will be a federated query portal and dashboard with analytic capabilities. The work has been supported by assistance from SEARCH, NCJA, and state Justice Assistance Grants along with resources contributed by the partner agencies. This dashboard portion of the project has tremendous potential for expansion to a statewide platform. The Data Sharing Task Force of the Commission maintains close ties with the Adams County project to try to leverage the county's work for a broader state reach.

Improving coordination between the jails and community treatment providers is a significant part of another grant-supported effort in Colorado. In 2015, Colorado was awarded a BJA Second Chance Act planning grant to study the feasibility of a criminal justice health exchange network.

This exchange will facilitate continuity of mental health services in order to safely stabilize persons in the community and reduce the rebound effect back to the jails. The safe and secure sharing of information on assessments, medication, and treatment history will improve options for diverting persons from the criminal justice system and improving outcomes for those in the system and exiting to the community.

## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMIT

Colorado has a number of fragmented systems that collect pockets of information relating to criminal justice, juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health. There have been discussions about ways to integrate information from system to system that acknowledge both the benefits and concerns when more information is accessible to more people.

One of the main keys to successful implementation of evidence-based practices is to understand the nature and needs of the population to which the practice is being applied. Consistent, accurate data will improve the selection and application of evidence-based practices, support better evaluation of impacts, increase the opportunities for successful reentry, and protect public safety with more efficient allocation and use of resources.

Future developments could include the expansion of the Adams County data dashboard to a statewide platform to better inform practitioners and the public about the criminal justice system. Additionally, improved information sharing among practitioners will likely lead to more effective case planning and continuity of care. This will require extensive collaboration to determine common definitions for data sets, rules for access, and general governance working from the federal guidance on information sharing and privacy concerns.

While laudable work integrating data and evidence-based practices has been done in Colorado, much of it has done as one-off efforts through the introduction of a project or program here or there. Participation in the Summit and the Reform Project will give Colorado the opportunity to build strategic, long-term plans around the use of data and evidence-based practices into our criminal justice system. The opportunity for ongoing training and technical assistance will give our state the extra boost we need to amplify, unify, and build off of the work we care deeply about and are currently working on in order to have lasting impact that will have immense future benefit for the State and the justice-involved individuals we serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of interest in consideration of this exciting initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John W. Hickenlooper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "H".

John W. Hickenlooper  
Governor

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