

Break the cycle; fund treatment



From the Sheriff's Desk
Sheriff
John Rutherford
Florida Partners In Crisis State Director

The state's band-aid approach to mental health funding and treatment is failing those who need help and is costing taxpayers millions.

The consequences of untreated mental illness have been hidden far too long. If we want to change what a recent presidential commission called our "broken" mental health system, the state must focus on front-end solutions that get to the root of the problem, instead of focusing on stopgap measures like short term incarcerations that only prolong suffering and drive up costs.

Being mentally ill is not a crime, but too many people who need treatment end up in our jails and prison systems due to their illnesses. Many are unable to get timely treatment in their local communities due to long waiting lists. As a result, many suffer psychotic breaks which lead to behaviors that cause their arrest. The offenses are often minor, such as disorderly conduct or open-container

violations, but unless the person is sick enough to be Baker Acted or hospitalized, officers have little choice but to take them to jail.

Jail is a frightening place for anyone, but it's a terrifying place for someone with a mental illness. I became an advocate on behalf of people with behavioral and substance abuse problems after seeing the same people with mental illnesses and drug problems arrested again and again. It's a scenario that's repeated every day in virtually every jurisdiction in the state. And it's costing taxpayers dearly.

Florida is the fourth largest state in the country, yet it tanks a dismal 47th in mental health funding. Even though the state has made some improvements over the years, the truth is that only 58 percent of adults and 52 percent of children who depend on publicly funded mental health treatment have access to those services. Additionally, less than 23 percent who need substance abuse treatment can get it.

Untreated mental illness and substance abuse are crippling our state and our communities and leaving people who need help with nowhere to turn.

Consider this:

- An estimated one in five inmates in Florida jails and nearly half of all youths in Florida's juvenile commitment programs have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness.
- Homelessness is up 23 percent in the last three years.
- Baker Act requests are up 51 percent over the last six years.
- 235 new crisis beds are needed just to meet current demands, and
- Our state has the second highest number of suicides in the nation.

Jails aren't treatment facilities. They were never intended to be. But funding for mental health services has never kept pace with demand. As a result, we have a system that's failing the sickest and most vulnerable.

If the state truly wants to reduce crime and addiction, it must make a commitment to get this population into community-based treatment. We recognize that these are challenging times for our state. Directing more dollars to treatment will help relieve the burden on the criminal justice system, save lives AND taxpayer dollars.

CLAY COUNTY'S MOST WANTED

The Clay County Sheriff's Office proudly endorses the efforts of the Justice Coalition to capture wanted criminals. Clay County Sheriff Scott Lancaster believes, like many local law enforcement leaders, that law-abiding citizens are very interested in helping solve crimes and in removing violent offenders from our streets. Clay County currently has more than 5,300 active criminal warrants and civil writs and appreciates any information that will help the agency clear these cases.



JEFFREY DON HICKS

Race: White **Sex:** Male
Violation: Wanted for failure to Return Leased Property and VOP on drug charges



RUBEN A. MALDONADO

Race: Black **Sex:** Male
Violation: Wanted for Grand Theft and Dealing in Stolen Property
AKA: Andrew Hernandez



ERIC SCOTT GLASS

Race: White **Sex:** Male
Violation: Wanted for Driving Under the Influence



MICHAEL W. VAN NESS

Race: White
Sex: Male
Violation: Wanted for Grand Theft (roofing scam)

PERSONS WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THESE INDIVIDUALS, PLEASE CONTACT CLAY COUNTY

Call the CCSO at (904) 264-6512 today!

Advertising Deadline

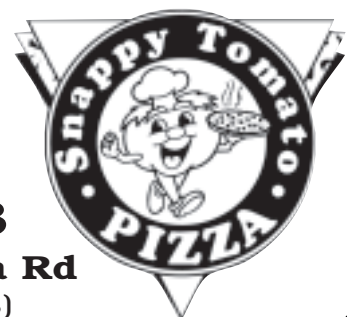
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