

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: AG Platkin Issues a Directive Formalizing the Office of Alternative and Community Responses Within Department of Law and Public Safety

03/14/2024

Office Solidifies General Platkin's Commitment to Advancing Innovative Public Safety Strategies

AG Directive 2024-01

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TRENTON – Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin today announced a groundbreaking step forward in addressing how New Jersey's law enforcement agencies respond to mental health and addiction crises by issuing an Administrative Directive to formally establish the Office of Alternative and Community Responses (OACR). This Office will support, coordinate, and spearhead initiatives aimed at how the Department of Law and Public Safety and New Jersey's law enforcement agencies respond to public health crises from the perspective of public safety.

New Jersey and the country are entering the third decade of the opioid crisis while experiencing an escalating mental health crisis. Law enforcement is often the first in the community to see the impact of these crises and the first to be asked to address them, often without the appropriate resources to do so. Traditional law enforcement responses and tools such as arrest, prosecution, and incarceration have proven inadequate in addressing the complexities of substance use disorder and mental health emergencies, often burdening frontline police officers and failing to provide effective solutions for the individual or the community impacted. This lack of success has underscored the need for coordinated strategies and solutions.

"The Office of Alternative and Community Responses helps to uplift and expand the work of community-centered programming to better serve individuals in crisis," **said Governor Phil Murphy**. "This entity will continue to supplement our law enforcement agencies on the front lines with innovative methods to assist residents in need and to confront these public health crises in communities across our state."

"The formal establishment of the Office of Alternative Community Responses represents a pivotal moment in our state's approach to public safety," **said Attorney General Platkin**. "By prioritizing collaborative, community-informed, and public health centered approaches, we aim to employ law-enforcement strategies that are smart, just, and which make our communities safer and healthier."

"For years, programs at the intersection of public safety and public health have existed in pockets around the State and the Department. The Office will allow for coordination, consistency, and capacity to build on that work and continue to innovate," **said Tiffany Wilson, Director of the Office of Alternative and Community Responses**. "Together, we're redefining public safety, while fostering relationships between law enforcement, health care professionals, and our communities aimed at keeping New Jerseyans safe and healthy."

"The creation of this new Office supports our efforts with the Attorney General to meet health care crises with a health care response," **said Sarah Adelman, Commissioner of New Jersey Department of Human Services**. "New Jersey is a national leader in implementing compassionate and evidence-based public safety initiatives. We look forward to collaborating with OACR on important issues like addressing the impact of opioids and substance use in our communities and de-escalating mental health crises without force or arrests."

The Office of the Attorney General has implemented impactful initiatives in the past decade to enhance public health and safety responses. One such initiative, the ARRIVE Together program launched in 2021, focuses on proactive approaches to mental health crises. Developed in collaboration with law enforcement, mental health experts, and communities, ARRIVE connects individuals experiencing a mental health emergency with treatment and resources. According to [The Brookings Institution's](#) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/bq0497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJll_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUUsQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBQPwbDbw\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/bq0497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJll_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUUsQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBQPwbDbw$)) March 2023 report, since its inception, ARRIVE has achieved better outcomes compared to traditional policing methods, with no instances of arrests or injuries reported. Force has only been used to safely transport individuals to medical facilities, at the direction of a certified mental health screener. These results remain consistent in what is currently approximately 2,800 interactions.

Initiatives such as Recovery Courts, Veterans Diversion Programs, and Mental Health Diversion Programs have been successful for those who have taken part in them, though they require formal entry into the criminal justice system. Additionally, over the past five years, the Administration of Governor Murphy, the State Legislature, and this Department have invested opioid settlement funds into strategies that reduce and prevent addiction and overdose due to opioids and other drugs. OACR will now consolidate these efforts under one Office, to remove unnecessary barriers and leverage expertise and resources for law enforcement and the communities they serve.

The establishment of OACR marks a significant milestone in the Department's ongoing priority of advancing innovation in public safety. The Office will focus on four key areas:

- Preventing crime and involvement with law enforcement through community-led strategies combating addiction and related conditions.
- Transforming law enforcement responses to emergencies by incorporating mental or behavioral health interventions and providing law enforcement with resources to pursue diversionary pathways.

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- Improving public safety through innovative, alternative approaches to entering or remaining in the criminal justice system in collaboration with courts and prosecutors.
- Promoting the resiliency of law enforcement officers through preventative strategies and interventions addressing their mental and emotional well-being.

OACR is being led by Director Tiffany Wilson, who joined the Office in July from the Union County Prosecutor's Office. The Directive issued by Attorney General Platkin today, establishes that Director Wilson's leadership team shall include, among others, a senior attorney who will be singularly focused on the expansion of education on the availability of New Jersey's Extreme Risk Protective Order, and who will be charged with working with the Division of Criminal Justice, the 21 County Prosecutors, and law enforcement leadership across the state to operationalize the strategic use of this life-saving, public safety tool. Candidates interested in applying for this leadership role within the OACR can learn more here: [OACR Career Opportunities](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/ri1497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBYZgVmOb$). ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/ri1497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBYZgVmOb\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/ri1497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBYZgVmOb$))

"Embracing the spirit of collaboration, the OACR serves as an example of unity within the Department of Law and Public Safety," said **Retired Chief Edward C. Dobleman, CIT-NJ Director of Legacy Treatment Services**. "By breaking down silos, streamlining processes, and prioritizing improved outcomes, it paves the way for a more effective support system. With its unified platform, the OACR amplifies its positive impact, promising a brighter future for individuals in crisis, first responders, mental health professionals, families, and our communities at large."

"This office will play a vital role in preventing firearm injury and death, including suicide and homicide. Their involvement in efforts to educate stakeholders about New Jersey's Extreme Risk Protection Order policy could save lives otherwise at risk of being lost in a moment of crisis," said **Michael D. Anestis, Executive Director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center**.

OACR will oversee the creation of four new bureaus. The Opioid Prevention and Response Bureau (OPRB) will focus on addiction-fighting efforts across the Department. A primary objective of the Bureau will be addressing the effects of opioid substance use disorder prior to any interaction with law enforcement or the criminal justice system. The Department's New Jersey Coordinator of Addiction Responses and Enforcement Strategies (NJ CARES) office will be under the supervision of OPRB. OPRB will also seek grants and resources to support these initiatives and be the point of contact in DLPS for discussions involving the use of settlement funds related to the State's various opioid litigation matters.

The Resiliency Bureau will address the mental and emotional toll on law enforcement through interventions and support programs. Originally established under [Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive 2019-1](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/7a2497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBSLgQoMd$), ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/7a2497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBSLgQoMd\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/rq3vel/nrddit/7a2497_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!PLC952311iAkhX4sGj0GVd9SR0v2rJlI_piRh67ri-N19slhRlVjJtmM2aszEBvJUuQuAwiiFzkYFjmeZkmgBSLgQoMd$)) it will now be administratively managed by the Resiliency Bureau within OACR. The bureau's mission is to support law enforcement personnel by addressing their mental and emotional challenges arising from their demanding and often traumatic work. It will oversee the statewide program, including the appointment and training of Resiliency Program Officers (RPOs) in law enforcement agencies across New Jersey, and collaborate with departments to promote resiliency initiatives.

The Law Enforcement-Led Alternative Policy and Programming Bureau (LEAPP) will coordinate alternative emergency responses and manage initiatives such as the ARRIVE Together program. LEAPP will oversee the expansion of the available law enforcement responses, incorporating mental or behavioral interventions and diversionary pathways when appropriate. It will manage the ARRIVE Together program for mental health emergencies and support expanding alternative response models statewide. LEAPP will also oversee initiatives like Opioid Response Teams, Law Enforcement Lead Diversion (LEAD), and Operation Helping Hand, diverting individuals from arrest to treatment and recovery services.

Finally, the Diversionary Policy Bureau (DPB) will set policies for diversionary programs led by the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) and county prosecutors' offices, aiming to reduce incarceration rates by addressing underlying issues driving criminal behavior. DPB will lead the Department in supporting and developing diversionary strategies and programs, particularly as they relate to mental health, special needs, substance use disorder and recovery, and other situations that can be better addressed outside of the traditional criminal justice system.

The establishment of OACR marks a crucial stride in the Office of the Attorney General's mission to exemplify and cultivate a culture of empathy within law enforcement and underscore the State's unwavering dedication to upholding the inherent dignity of every individual. By championing respect, dignity, and recovery, OACR amplifies its commitment to equitable treatment by extending a supportive hand to communities affected by addiction and mental health issues.

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