

## ATTACHMENT E

### **Supervisor Lange Question: Percentage of Persons with Mental Health Issues in Jail**

At a meeting of the Public Protection and Justice System Committee, Committee Chair Lange asked for data on the prevalence of mental health problems among Racine County Jail inmates.

Executive Branch staff noted that some frequently cited 1999 nationwide data came from studies in which the prevalence of mental health problems was judged on the basis of inmates' responses to two mental health-related questions. In that vein, the Sheriff's Department offered to provide statistical data based on answers to questions in health screenings conducted on all Racine County Jail admissions in 2004.

According to the 1999 nationwide study, "16 percent of those in state prisons or local jails or on probation said they either had a mental condition or had stayed overnight in a mental hospital, unit or treatment program." Inmates were asked these questions:

- Do you have a mental or emotional condition?
- Because of an emotional or mental problem, have you ever—
  - Taken a medication prescribed by a psychiatrist or other doctor?
  - Been admitted to a mental hospital, unit or treatment program where you stayed overnight?
  - Received counseling or therapy from a trained professional?
  - Received any other mental health services?<sup>1</sup>

On admission, the Racine County Jail asks the following, comparable questions:

- A. Have you had any past treatment for mental health problems?
- B. Have you recently seen a mental health professional?
- C. Have you recently been hospitalized for this problem?<sup>2</sup>

As reflected in the attached spreadsheet, using the response to the most broadly stated question—"Have you had any past treatment for mental health problems?"—14.4% of the county's 2004 admissions had mental health issues. This is comparable to the 16% figure from the nationwide data.

It should be noted that a person answering one or more of those questions affirmatively does not necessarily have a serious mental illness; much less does the person's mental health condition necessarily affect his/her competency to stand trial or his/her criminal responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, **Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers** <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/mhtip.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Intake personnel are also asked to assess suicide risk through these questions:

- A. Does this inmate's behavior suggest the risk of suicide?
- B. Do you feel suicidal at this time?
- C. Have you ever attempted suicide?
- D. Does this inmate exhibit behavior to suggest risk to staff and/or other inmates?

