

Governor, state officials, service providers mark success of community-based pretrial supervision initiatives

Wilmington – Governor Jack Markell, corrections officials, and non-profit service providers today visited the [Rick VanStory Resource Center](#) (RVRC) in Wilmington to mark the one year anniversary of an innovative partnership with the Department of Correction and highlight the state's ongoing efforts to strengthen community-based pretrial supervision programs for low risk defendants whose needs for treatment and services outweigh their risks to public safety.

Last November the Department of Correction awarded a contract to RVRC in an innovative pilot program funded through a grant in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget [to provide supervision to low risk defendants](#) facing trial. Through this program, case workers conduct detailed needs assessments and use that data to connect defendants immediately to treatment and other social services, ensure that their clients appear for court as required, and monitor their compliance with other conditions of their release. The RVRC program frees up the Probation Officers in DOC's pre-trial services unit to help protect the community by focusing on the higher risk defendants who have posted bail. Over the past seven years, the number of defendants ordered to pre-trial supervision has nearly tripled statewide, while over the last twelve months, Delaware's incarcerated population has dropped 3 percent, mostly among pre-trial detainees. Today, the Department of Correction monitors more than 500 defendants statewide who are subject to court-ordered community-based supervision while they await

trial.

“Detaining individuals before trial imposes significant costs on our justice system and can lead to higher recidivism rates,” **said Markell**. “That’s why we have worked hard to make better informed bail decisions and to build effective community-based pre-trial programs. Together, these programs can make a tremendous difference in outcomes for offenders and have a positive impact on public safety.”

For low risk individuals who come into the criminal justice system, remaining in the community enhances their chances of success in the long term. Effective community-based supervision while they await trial can ensure that they appear for court as required and that they comply with other conditions of their release that keep the public safe. Community-based supervision also preserves those individuals’ strong bonds with family and community supports, allows them to maintain or obtain employment, and enables them to begin to receive treatment and social services that they would not have access to in prison.

“Under Governor Markell’s leadership we have invested considerable resources into building a community-based pretrial supervision system that can better support defendants’ efforts to forge a new path for their lives and become positive contributors to our state,” said Department of Correction Commissioner **Robert Coupe**.

Across Delaware the number of individuals detained in prison while they await trial has grown exponentially over the past two decades. Since 1983, while the state’s population grew by 50%, the detained population ballooned by more than 450%. During Markell’s, term state government has been working to implement reforms that are beginning to bend the curve down while maintaining public safety as a guiding principle. Through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, for example, Delaware now emphasizes an evidence-based model for assessing

risk in setting bail and imposing sentences, rewards those who complete rehabilitation programs with good time credits for early release, and reforms our probation system to incorporate risk and needs assessments, graduated sanctions, and compliance credits to end supervision for those who are succeeding in the community.

Allen Conover, CEO of the Rick VanStory Resource Center, emphasized that by providing treatment and services to defendants, the RVRC pre-trial program has experienced a high rate of success. “Therapeutic interventions outweigh punitive interventions when the needs outweigh the risk,” Conover said today.

During their visit, officials highlighted other steps being taken by the state to make more informed bail decisions and build the capacity to effectively supervise defendants in the community in order to ensure that limited and expensive prison space is reserved for high risk defendants who pose a public safety risk:

- Delaware’s courts now use a risk assessment tool to identify defendants who are good candidates for pre-trial release or community-based supervision by the Department of Correction or community based organizations.
- Earlier this year the Department of Correction, Public Defender’s office, and Attorney General’s office initiated a pilot program to identify low risk defendants charged with lower level offenses who are being held on low bail in order to consider appropriate cases where the Court should be petitioned to modify the bail and allow a defendant to return to the community while they await trial. This bail review initiative has identified more than two dozen cases for review and has resulted in several bail modifications and releases to the community.
- Delaware is participating in the Smart Pretrial Initiative, a federally-funded program that is bringing police, prosecutors, the public defender, and judiciary together to

recommend ways we can build a better pretrial system to reduce the prison population, ensure public safety, and reduce recidivism.

Kate Parker West from the Delaware Center for Justice (DCJ) who coordinates Delaware's Smart Pretrial Demonstration Initiative acknowledged that the Initiative has experienced progress during the planning process as a result of the broad support among criminal justice stakeholders statewide who come together to consider strategically how best to improve our system. "From DCJs perspective, the unnecessary detention of low and moderate risk arrestees presents just as big of a public safety concern as the under-supervised release of high risk arrestees," she said.