

For Immediate Release

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Washtenaw County initiative aims to reduce the number of individuals with behavioral health issues in Washtenaw's criminal justice system.

YPSILANTI, Mich., February 7, 2024 – The [Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion and Deflection \(LEADD\)](#) initiative pilot in Ypsilanti Township is providing officers with alternatives to citation, arrest, and incarceration.

LEADD is a pre-arrest diversion program that connects individuals suspected of low-level criminal offenses with specially trained, community-based case managers. LEADD case managers use a harm reduction framework to help participants access resources and supports.

A [recent evaluation of LEADD](#) conducted by the [Center for Health and Research Transformation](#) highlights the program's role in reversing the overrepresentation of Black individuals within the criminal justice system.

The LEADD pilot was launched in October 2021 through a collaborative effort between McLain and Winters Law Firm, [Washtenaw County Community Mental Health](#), [Washtenaw County Office of the Public Defender](#), [Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office](#), and the [Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office](#).

Since its inception, the pilot has achieved several significant milestones including:

- Trained 32 deputies and recruits (68 percent of those in Ypsilanti Township) and five sergeants (80 percent of those in Ypsilanti Township) in the evidence-based model, which is being employed by dozens of other municipalities across the country.
- Received 62 referrals since the pilot commenced in October 2021, assessing referred individuals to see if they meet program criteria; and
- Served 22 qualified residents with prior law enforcement interactions such as trespass, panhandling, disorderly conduct, and other low-risk, low level offenses.

Once enrolled, two Washtenaw County Community Mental Health case managers, Willie Sturdivant Jr. and Jacquelyn Campbell, help participants access substance use treatment, mental health counseling, supportive housing, food, vital documents like government-issued IDs, and more.

“Connecting individuals to services early in the process by meeting them where they are—physically, emotionally, psychologically—is the most effective way to help an individual

meet their needs and support the system's effective management of community risk,” says Washtenaw County Sheriff Jerry Clayton.

Through trauma-informed case management, LEADD strives to reduce the number of individuals in the criminal justice system and in jail—both of which are high-cost interventions funded by taxpayers—and to stem future law enforcement interactions.

Not only is LEADD helping individuals get connected to needed services, it's also improving community trust in law enforcement. For example, one LEADD deputy described that they have noticed that individuals who have avoided engaging with law enforcement in the past will now initiate casual conversations and check-in with deputies.

Nationally, over 75 locations have launched similar programs with support from the [LEAD National Support Bureau](#).

Evidence suggests that LEAD programs have been successful in lowering arrests, felony charges, and recidivism rates by connecting individuals with essential social support services. An evaluation conducted in King County, Washington, where LEAD was first introduced over a decade ago, demonstrated that participants were 58 percent less likely to be arrested after enrolling in the program compared to individuals who did not participate.

Local leaders and elected officials may explore the possibility of launching LEADD countywide in the future.

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The [Washtenaw County's Sheriff Office](#) (WCSO) focuses on building strong local communities through quality public safety and social justice services for all of Washtenaw County. The Sheriff's Office and [Washtenaw County Community Mental Health](#) chose to invest in LEADD and used funds provided by the county's [Public Safety and Mental Health Preservation Millage](#) to initiate and sustain the initiative. Additional funding to support LEADD's launch in October 2021 was made possible through Vital Strategies. The Community Foundation of Southeast MI supports part of the initiative's evaluation. The initiative is also sustained by in-kind contributions from all LEADD stakeholders.