



## **Association for the Public Defender of Maryland (APDM) Receives Grant from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield to Connect Justice-Involved Youth in Prince George's County with Behavioral Health Services**

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Last week, the Association for the Public Defender of Maryland (APDM) was awarded over \$450,000 from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield (CareFirst) for the Justice-Involved Youth Behavioral Health Access Project. This three-year grant will increase access to services and improve wellness for justice-involved youth in Prince George's County through screening, assessment, planning, ongoing support, and referrals to appropriate behavioral health treatment and community-based services. It is a collaboration between APDM, CareFirst, and the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (OPD).

"Far too often, children in Prince George's County get swept into the juvenile justice system due to an unaddressed behavioral health issue," said District Public Defender for Prince George's County Melissa Pryce. "This grant will provide dedicated resources to ensure that our young clients are connected with community-based treatment services that will address their needs, rather than exacerbating their underlying issues with incarceration."

The Justice-Involved Youth Behavioral Health Access Project is part of a larger \$7.9 million grant investment from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield (CareFirst), the largest not-for-profit health plan in the mid-Atlantic region, to improve behavioral health outcomes for youth across its service areas in the region

"CareFirst recognizes that behavioral health is an essential part of overall health, which includes a continuum of conditions ranging from severe mental health disorders to the emotional, psychological, and social factors that affect a person's overall wellbeing," said Dr. Destiny-Simone Ramjohn, Vice President of Community Health and Social Impact for CareFirst. "We are proud to invest in 19 dynamic organizations who will minimize behavioral health disparities among young people and dramatically increase the number of trained health professionals that provide culturally responsive and trauma-informed behavioral health care."

This is the second partnership between APDM, OPD, and CareFirst. CareFirst previously supported an initiative in Frederick and Washington Counties to connect OPD adult clients with an opioid use disorder with community-based treatment services. "APDM is proud to work with CareFirst and OPD to address the unmet mental health and substance abuse needs of justice involved individuals," said Johanna Leshner, APDM's Co-Executive Director. "When public health issues are addressed through the criminal justice system, public defenders are uniquely able to successfully intervene."

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