

Focus on *Access to Justice*

For more information, visit www.lsba.org/atj.

Criminal Justice Committee hosts summit on mental health and the criminal justice system

Criminal justice stakeholders, mental health experts and advocates from across the state gathered on April 26 in Baton Rouge for the seventh Criminal Justice Summit hosted by the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Criminal Justice Committee. This year, the summit focused on measures to address the increasing number of individuals with mental health conditions coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

"One in five adults in the United States have some degree of mental illness [and] ... 65% of inmates in county jail have some degree of mental illness," said St. Charles Parish Sheriff Gregory C. Champagne, discussing the growing rate of law enforcement encounters with the mentally ill. "Behavior of [the] untreated mentally ill escalates over time [and] longer stretches in jail and solitary confinement exacerbates the problem," he said.

Unfortunately, jails and prisons tend to be the largest mental health care providers in the United States. While most agree that jails and prisons are not places for



This Criminal Justice Summit panel shared information on crisis intervention team programs and training. From left, William C. Credo III, at podium; Loren M. Lampert, Louisiana District Attorneys Association; St. Charles Parish Sheriff Gregory C. Champagne; and Chief Clifford Gatlin, Louisiana College.

people with mental illnesses, the summit attendees asked, "What can we do once a person with mental health needs enters or comes into contact with the system?" Crisis intervention teams, communication and identification strategies, and innovative programs for victims, criminal defendants and juveniles are a few of the topics discussed to answer this question.

To prevent interaction with the criminal justice system, 19th Judicial District Court Judge Donald R. Johnson present-



Discussing innovative programs at the Criminal Justice Summit were, from left, Barksdale Hortenstine, Jr., Orleans Public Defenders; Aaron Rizzio-Clark, Louisiana Center for Children's Rights; Kristen Raby, Victim Services, 19th JDC District Attorney's Office; and East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar C. Moore III.

ed the new laws regarding assisted outpatient treatment programs in civil court, which creates a civil process to petition for a court-ordered treatment plan for people with serious mental illness. This process can be performed without the commission of a crime and was developed as a means to prevent people with serious mental illness ending up in jail or Department of Correction's custody.

The summit was interactive and included four working group sessions. Attendees continued conversations about the topics presented and discussed what they were seeing in their districts regarding mental health services. Many expressed concern for the lack of access to mental health care and proposed the creation of a resource repository so people know where to go when experiencing a mental health crisis.

The summit was coordinated by the Planning Subcommittee — Chair Jean M. Faria, Richard J. Bourke, Barksdale Hortenstine, Jr., Loren M. Lampert and Kerry K. Lentini.

The Criminal Justice Committee is now drafting a summit report including topics presented and recommendations discussed. To learn more about the event, report or other activities of the Criminal Justice Committee, email LSBA staff liaison Amy E. Duncan at amy.duncan@lsba.org.



October 21-26, 2019

In support of National Celebrate Pro Bono Week, the Louisiana Library Association and the Louisiana State Bar Association are sponsoring Lawyers in Libraries events across Louisiana, where libraries host attorney volunteers for educational workshops and "Ask a Lawyer" sessions. *Your volunteerism at these events helps ensure that justice is available to all, regardless of income.*

**Make a difference and ensure justice:
volunteer in your local library!**

To participate in a Lawyers in Libraries event, sign up at
www.lsba.org/louisianalawyersinlibraries.