CITY OF KNOXVILLE
MADELINE ROGERO, MAYOR

KNOX COUNTY
TIM BURCHETT, MAYOR

SHERIFF
KNOX COUNTY

April 24, 2017

Dear Members of Justice Knox:

Thank you for contacting us about the *Justice Knox* initiative, and its two key focus areas of public school disciplinary policies and gaps in the mental health care system. In this letter, we will respond to the two specific requests you have made regarding mental health, and we'll provide additional context and information about our current strategies and future plans. The City and County are working together intentionally and collaboratively to address mental health issues, so that is why we have chosen to respond together by way of this letter.

Addressing the mental health needs of the people in our community is important to all of us both personally and professionally. We have been and will continue to be committed to addressing those needs in the best way that we can. We are encouraged by the fact that so many congregations have joined together as *Justice Knox* in order to focus on this issue as well.

As is the case nationally, meeting the needs of individuals and families struggling with mental illness here in Knox County presents us with very difficult challenges. As you have noted, the intersection of mental illness and the criminal justice system is of particular concern. How the police department and sheriff's office interact with people in crisis is incredibly important, as is what happens to those individuals after that point. We are in agreement that many people currently end up in jail, when treatment would be far more appropriate.

Knox County already commits $3.9 million to its indigent medical care budget and works with Cherokee Health Systems to provide healthcare to people in our community who lack the financial resources to obtain care for themselves. As the primary healthcare provider for the Knox County Health Department, Cherokee Health Systems operates under an *Integrated Care* model, meaning that physical and behavioral health care are provided together, at the same time and in a coordinated way. These services are provided at five locations throughout the county, including one location on Fifth Avenue that specifically serves people experiencing homelessness.

The City of Knoxville has worked with partners throughout the community to create a comprehensive community plan to address homelessness. This plan specifically identifies goals to address mental health needs. As part of this effort, Mayor Rogero chairs a quarterly *Mayor's Roundtable on Homelessness,* which brings together the leadership of over twenty-five community partners to

coordinate implementation of the plan. The City has an Office on Homelessness to coordinate with Roundtable partners and others to pursue the plan's goals throughout the year. This effort includes KnoxHMIS, operated by the UT College of Social Work. This Homeless Management Information System is a database that is used by service providers to track individuals who receive services in order to coordinate resources and individuals' care across all partner agencies. KnoxHMIS also provides ongoing outcomes measurements and other data that is available to the community through an online community dashboard report. See www.KnoxHMIS.org.

The City annually provides direct funding of about $450,000 for case management, services and supportive housing. The City also provides about $2 million in federal funds to address affordable housing needs, including rehabilitation, repair and development. These are all factors you have identified as critical to addressing mental health needs in our community.

Mayor Rogero has also signed on to the *Cities Thrive Coalition*. This organization of cities from across the country have joined together to advocate to our federal partners on the need for mental health resources, and to share ideas and best practices for meeting mental health needs in our cities.

Crisis Intervention Training

Several years ago, both the Knox County Sheriff's Office and the Knoxville Police Department committed to the concept of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and implementation. Developed in Memphis, this model brings together law enforcement with mental health providers and hospital emergency departments. Officers are trained to recognize the symptoms of individuals who are experiencing mental health crises in order to de-escalate difficult situations and, when necessary, engage those individuals with mental health intervention and treatment.

Currently, approximately thirty percent of both KCSO and KPD officers have received CIT training. All incoming recruit classes already receive this training. **Both organizations are committed to working with the Helen Ross McNabb Center to provide all officers with CIT training over the next two years.**

Chief Rausch has also just signed on to the *One Mind* initiative of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. This initiative focuses on improved police interactions with persons affected by mental illness and includes committing to CIT training and to training in Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety.

Jail Diversion and Building Capacity for Effective Treatment

The concept of *jail diversion* has also been under development in Knoxville and Knox County for the last few years. All of us – both mayors, the Sheriff, and the Police Chief –are in agreement that too many people struggling with mental health problems end up in jail when they, as well as the community as a whole, would be better served if they received treatment, social services and housing instead.

The County, the City, both law enforcement agencies, the District Attorney, community partners like Helen Ross McNabb Center and others joined together to conduct extensive research over the past several years into the *jail diversion* concept. Best Practices were examined in places including Bexar County/San Antonio, Texas; Dade County/Miami Florida; Maricopa County/Phoenix, Arizona; Davidson County/Nashville, Tennessee; and Buncombe County/Asheville, North Carolina.

It became clear to us that shifting low-level offenders with behavioral health disorders away from incarceration and into treatment alternatives addresses multiple community issues, including jail overcrowding, hospital costs, jail recidivism, chronic homelessness, and, of course, the individual well-being of those who are diverted into treatment.

As a result, Knox County issued a request for proposals for a jail diversion initiative, and a joint City and County committee were involved in the process that resulted in the selection of the Helen Ross McNabb Center to develop an initiative that is now known as the *Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center (BHUCC).* Knox County and the City of Knoxville have committed funding to develop the BHUCC facility and to operate it once it opens later this year. Additional funding is anticipated from the State of Tennessee as well. Other community partners like local hospitals will also play a role. Helen Ross McNabb Center will operate the center, and the Sheriff's Office will maintain a 24/7 presence there.

Officers will be trained to recognize when low-level offenders exhibit behavioral health symptoms within certain guidelines, and will be able to bring them to the BHUCC. Individuals will be assessed there and will see a magistrate via videoconference, where they will be given the option to receive treatment instead of going to jail. Once diverted, individuals will begin a 72-hour process of stabilization, treatment, and discharge planning, in order to connect them with treatment, social services and, when needed, housing options after they leave the BHUCC. The discharge plan will address follow-up care and assure that outcomes data is collected to assure accountability. The purpose is not just the immediate diversion, but the long-term result – that people struggling with mental illness receive the needed resources for treatment, social services and housing,

to improve their lives and minimize future interaction with the criminal justice system.

So we are pleased to report that we have achieved your goal of conducting extensive research on the jail diversion concept; we have successfully gained stakeholder cooperation and buy-in to coordinate services; we have significant multi-year funding committed to develop and operate the BHUCC; and we will collect and analyze data from the BHUCC in order to evaluate its outcomes. As a result, we respectfully submit that there is no need to hire a consultant to repeat the process of research, assessment and recommendations for jail diversion. That part is done, and we are already beginning implementation.

The City and County are already working together, through the BHUCC and other initiatives mentioned above, to increase our community's capacity to treat and care for people with mental illness. We are very pleased and grateful that your own research has taken you down a similar thought process to what we have already begun.

The truth is, although the BHUCC is a big commitment and a significant leap forward for this community, it will not address all of Knoxville and Knox County's behavioral health needs by itself. And as representatives of City and County governments, we know we cannot solve all these problems alone. We are always looking for new partnerships and for others in the community to come to the table. The fact that seventeen congregations have come together to form *Justice Knox* and identified mental health as one of two key priorities presents a significant new opportunity.

On your fact sheet, you correctly note that our community needs more supportive housing for people with mental illness, and that supportive housing with case management is cost-effective. In the community plans already mentioned here, we identified the same needs and we have worked with community partners and funders to develop supportive housing that has proven to be both effective and an asset to neighborhoods. But we need more supply in order to meet the demand.

We need your help. Working together, the seventeen congregations of *Justice Knox* could be a significant force for good in our community. Will you help us raise more funds for local mental health service agencies so they can provide additional social services and supportive housing? Will you volunteer for these agencies so they can expand their reach? When locations for treatment centers and supportive housing are proposed, will you speak up in support of them and help your neighbors understand the need? We need community members who understand the need and share this vision to be willing to actively speak out in support.

We agree that mental health resources are a critical need in our community, and we are grateful that you have identified this as a priority for your congregations. We hope you will bring your considerable collective resources to bear on this issue, so that together we can meet the behavioral health needs of every member of our community.

Sincerely,

Madeline Rogero Knoxville Mayor	Tim Burchett Knox Co. Mayor	JJ Jones Knox Co. Sheriff	David Rausch Knoxville Police Chief