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Over 500 Justice and Behavioral Health Professionals Attend 2025 Criminal Justice Conference Emphasizing Collaboration and Resiliency

Commission on Crime and Delinquency presents three awards recognizing outstanding leadership and innovation across the criminal justice field



State College, PA — Yesterday, the **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)** kicked off the 2025 Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) Conference in State College. The two-day event brought together over 530 criminal justice and behavioral health professionals from across the Commonwealth, the largest gathering since the conference's inception in 2007. Throughout the conference, participants engaged in discussions on new and reemerging issues impacting the criminal justice and behavioral health systems and innovative solutions to address evolving trends.

Under the Shapiro-Davis Administration, the Commonwealth has achieved notable improvements in public safety. According to data released by CeaseFirePA, Pennsylvania has seen a 42% decrease in total victims of gun violence statewide, and a 38% drop in gun deaths by firearm since 2022. These outcomes reflect the impact of intentional, cross-system collaboration among law enforcement, behavioral health and criminal justice professionals, community-based organizations, courts, and policymakers.

"When I think about what truly embodies PCCD's mission, this annual conference stands out as a shining example," said **PCCD Executive Director Kirsten**

Kenyon. “This gathering represents the collective strength of our justice system—bringing together dedicated professionals from law enforcement, the courts, behavioral health, and community organizations. It is through these vital partnerships that we build stronger, safer, and more resilient communities.”

This year's conference, themed "*From Crisis to Collaboration: Building Resilient Justice Systems*," addressed the pressing challenges facing Pennsylvania's justice and behavioral health systems with a focus on fostering cross-sector partnerships and collaborative solutions to enhance system resilience. Breakout sessions discussed critical topics such as behavioral health screening, risk assessments, law enforcement collaboration, crisis response strategies, and supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. These sessions aim to equip attendees with practical tools and strategies to build more resilient, responsive justice systems.

“The county CJAB helps to bring together government officials, service providers, and related entities into one location, where there is diversity of opinions and thoughts that can collectively create policies and procedures for the criminal justice system. All too often we are broken into different silos and do not communicate well. CJAB is the perfect forum to share ideas and allow everyone an opportunity to be heard,” said **Judge Stephen B. Minor, founding Chairman of the Potter County CJAB**. “The Conference provides a forum to see what other jurisdictions are doing to reduce recidivism and to analyze whether these practices can be implemented in some fashion in our own counties. I have never left the Conference without the desire to try a new program or policy that another jurisdiction has successfully used.”

Today, PCCD Executive Director Kenyon presented three distinguished awards recognizing outstanding leadership and innovation in criminal justice:

CJAB Best Practices Award

Butler County

Created in partnership with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, the CJAB Best Practices Award recognizes a county that exemplifies innovative collaboration in support of public safety. Butler County was named the 2025 recipient for its inclusive, solution-oriented CJAB that embraces fresh ideas and collaborative approaches. Their work prioritizes treatment, recovery, and reentry—building safer, healthier communities through creativity and commitment.

Honorable Linda K.M. Ludgate Excellence in CJAB Leadership Award

Honorable Stephen B. Minor, Potter County

Named in honor of the late Judge Ludgate, a trailblazer in CJAB development, this award celebrates leadership that drives systemic improvement. Judge Minor, founding Chairman of the Potter County CJAB, was honored for his visionary leadership. Under his guidance, the CJAB launched pretrial and diversion programs, supported reentry efforts, and established the Women's Residential Recovery Center. His work aligns with national initiatives like Stepping Up and Data-Driven Justice to improve rural justice responses, particularly for individuals with behavioral health needs.

Honorable John A. Zottola Mental Health and Justice Award

Julia Lekner-Leslie, Community Behavioral Health, Philadelphia

Established in 2022 to honor the legacy of Judge John A. Zottola, this award celebrates a commitment to working with individuals with mental health needs in the justice system. Julia Lekner-Leslie of Community Behavioral Health in Philadelphia was the 2025 recipient. Her tireless work with justice-involved youth, deep empathy, and cross-system collaboration exemplifies the spirit of the award. She is a powerful advocate for destigmatizing behavioral health challenges and promoting systemic reforms that enhance outcomes for young people.

The conference was hosted by PCCD in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has 67 county-level CJABs who have been instrumental in formulating plans, introducing innovative solutions, and fostering collaborative approaches in all aspects of their local criminal justice system. The boards have diverse memberships, which can include high-ranking officials and representatives of courts, corrections, law enforcement, community-based organizations, health and human services, victims' services agencies, businesses, and faith-based organizations. PCCD supports CJABs through the provision of technical assistance by CJAB Specialists and making funds available to support CJAB-sponsored initiatives.

Photos from day two of the conference and awards ceremony will be available on [PAcast.com](https://www.pacast.com).