

## **JUNE ROLL CALL TRAINING**

### **Jail High-Risk Critical Task/Inmate Suicide Prevention**

The only circumstance in which government actors have a clear constitutional duty to protect individuals is when the individual is involuntarily detained. The question often arises as to the degree of liability that exists when the individual's injury is self-inflicted. When dealing with prisoners who commit suicide while in custody, the courts have required a "deliberate indifference" to the need for suicide prevention to make out a constitutional claim. Most courts have required a finding that the suicide was foreseeable before an action for violation of civil rights will be established.

The purpose of this policy is to direct the screening and care of prisoners who are at risk of self-harm, including suicide. It is the policy of this agency to provide adequate mental health screening and care for those persons incarcerated in jail. The booking officer shall screen all persons booked into the jail to identify potential safety risks including self-harm; suicide; danger to others (assault risk); mental illness; alcohol or drug abuse; cognitive deficits; and/or the need for special accommodations.

The booking officer shall check the incoming prisoner's history through the jail records management system for any alerts or known risk factors and complete the agency-approved medical health screening form. In any case where it is indicated that the prisoner needs immediate psychological care, staff shall place the prisoner on high-risk protocols. In an emergency, emergency medical services shall be notified for immediate response.

When a detainee shows signs of or reports unusual physical or mental distress, he or she shall be referred to a qualified mental health professional as soon as possible. Detainees exhibiting psychiatric symptoms such as acute psychotic features or mood disturbances, or those who have a known psychiatric history, shall be evaluated by a mental health professional. Detainees exhibiting suicidal behavior or ideations shall be placed in a reasonable level of care that provides for their safety and stability. A prisoner who is placed on suicide watch shall not be taken off suicide watch except on the direction of a qualified mental health professional that has completed a suicide risk evaluation.

**Scenario:** During book-in screening questions, an arrestee states that he is not contemplating suicide. Upon checking the inmate's file, the booking officer discovers that the last two times (both within the last year) the arrestee had been in the jail, he attempted suicide and disclosed a history of mental illness.

**Question:** What should the booking officer do with this information?

**Answer:** The booking officer should follow the agency's policy for heightened risk of suicide with this arrestee/detainee. This should include close monitoring, in-person welfare checks every 10-15 minutes, and an evaluation of risk by a mental health staff member.