

Linkages between Community Mental Health Services, Homelessness, and  
Inmates and Probationers with Severe Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based  
Assessment

(Technical Report)

Care over Incarceration: Decriminalization  
of Mental Illness in the United States

(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis Portfolio  
Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Engineering and Applied Science  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science in Systems Engineering

by

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May 8, 2020

## Preface

How can the U.S. criminal justice system better accommodate mentally ill inmates? Because of limited access to mental health treatment, many mentally ill people in the United States encounter a criminal justice system that does not serve their mental health needs.

How can the Thomas Jefferson Area Community Criminal Justice Board better serve the mental health needs of inmates in jails? At the Albemarle Charlottesville Regional Jail, only 21 percent of patients with severe mental illness receive community mental health services upon release. To investigate the problem for community leaders, the research team integrated resources from police departments, jails, Region 10 services, and the Thomas Jefferson Area Coalition for the Homeless into a database which was used to identify predictive characteristics of mentally ill inmates, including age and substance abuse comorbidity, and patterns in former inmates' paths through the community resources.

How are mental health advocacies in the U.S. seeking to protect vulnerable inmates with mental illnesses? Following deinstitutionalization, prisons and jails became de facto but ill-equipped treatment centers. Mental health advocacies strive to remove mentally ill people from prisons for community-based treatment. Mental health professionals and prisoner advocacies demand better mental health conditions in jails, including less solitary confinement and expanded access to mental health treatment for inmates. They urge policy makers to invest in community-based treatment and pre-arrest diversion programs to keep mentally ill people in their own communities.

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