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## Baltimore County receives grant to support inmate re-entry program

By Amy P. Graziano

THE AVENUE NEWS STAFF

Over the next three years Baltimore County estimates about 900 inmates will be leaving the County's Detention Center and incorporating themselves back into the community. As a way to help these individuals become productive County residents once again, and to prevent them from returning to the Detention Center, the County is investing the proceeds of a grant they received to support a "re-entry" program for these individuals. On Monday, March 21, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz was joined by other state and county officials in announcing the County's award of a \$350,000 grant from the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC). The money from the grant will be used to provide behavioral health and intensive case management services to previously incarcerated individuals

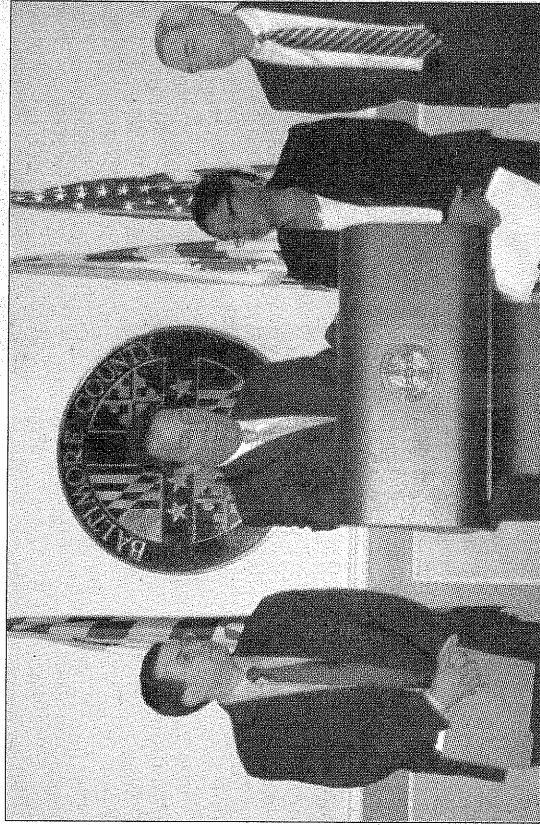


PHOTO BY AMY P. GRAZIANO

County Executive Kevin Kamenetz (second from left) was joined by (far left) Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Dr. Joshua M. Shartstein, Commissioner of the Community Health Resources Commission Paula McLellan, and Baltimore County States Attorney Scott Shellenberger in announcing Baltimore County has received a \$350,000 grant to provide health resources to incarcerated individuals re-entering the community.

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# Ninety percent of inmates have substance abuse problems

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cerated individuals.

"The majority of inmates will return to the community," explained Kamenetz. "Substance abuse is a chronic disease and relapsing helps fuel a cycle of never ending poverty and crime."

"Research shows people who get care don't have serious complications and relapses," said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "This also helps the community because when people commit crimes it can cause serious problems for others."

The County's program is based on a similar program in Harford County, which has been very successful. The CHRC has also awarded a grant to the Harford County re-entry program as well as to similar programs in Baltimore City and Prince George's County. These programs provide health care and intensive case-management services to members of the criminal justice population and have attracted the support of public health advocates, law enforcement officials, and the judicial community.

Over the last five years, CHRC has awarded 78 grants totaling \$21.6 million and supported programs in every jurisdiction in the state. More than 81,000 Marylanders have benefited from services made available through these grants. In addition to the current re-entry grant, Baltimore County has received two previous grants from CHRC, which were used to support the County's efforts to improve birth outcomes and expand a school-based health center program.

"This program is about where the rubber hits the road," said James P. O'Neill, Director of the Baltimore County Department of Corrections, about the inmate re-entry program. "Serving 900 people in three years is ambitious but

we can do it."

As O'Neill explained, the average daily population in the County's Detention Center is 1,340. About 60 percent of these inmates are awaiting trial while 40 percent are serving a sentence. About 90 percent have substance abuse problems and about 25 percent have mental health problems.

"It costs about \$82 a day to support someone in jail while it costs \$7 a day to supervise them in the community," said O'Neill. "Obviously it's better if they can re-

enter the community."

"Receiving this grant from the Commission is another step toward our goal of ensuring that we have healthy people living, working, and playing in Baltimore County," stated Baltimore County Health Officer Dr. Gregory William Branch. "We now have an opportunity to embrace our prodigal sons and daughters with open arms, equip them with services and resources to help rebuild their lives, and empower them as they re-enter their families and communities."