



# COMMON PLEAS COURT

## GENERAL DIVISION

Richard E. Berens, Administrative Judge  
David A. Trimmer, Judge

### PRESS RELEASE

October 25, 2016

On Friday, October 21, 2016, Fairfield County officially kicked off its SteppingUp Initiative, which aims to safely reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses in jails. The kickoff luncheon was hosted by former Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton and Thom Craig of the Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation, who spoke of available resources and affirmative steps that organizations, private individuals, and public officials can take to help keep the mentally ill population from becoming long-term residents of our local correctional facilities. In attendance were Common Pleas Court Judges Richard E. Berens and David A. Trimmer, Commissioner Dave Levacy, representatives from county and city law enforcement agencies, counseling and treatment centers including New Horizons, the local ADAMH Board, and several other community leaders.

“We were very pleased that the Commissioners signed Fairfield County up for Stepping Up. We had a great cross-section turn-out on Friday and are very impressed with the collaboration that already exists,” said retired Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, who serves as the state-wide Project Director of Ohio’s SteppingUp Initiative. “Hopefully our project can build on those partnerships by giving Fairfield County the tools, resources, and technical assistance to break the cycle of jails being de facto mental health hospitals. Our goal is that those with mental illnesses will be able to obtain the assistance they need and will regain their lives and dignity.”

In April 2016, the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners committed to joining the national SteppingUp Initiative, after recognizing that without proper intervention and treatment, individuals with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance disorders often unnecessarily cycle through the criminal justice system. The Initiative strives to break this cycle by connecting mentally ill individuals with community-based treatment and services, which aligns with the County’s mission to protect and enhance the health, welfare, and safety of its residents in efficient and cost-effective ways.

“Unless offenders’ underlying mental illnesses are properly addressed and treated, it is likely that offenders will repeat the criminal behavior which brought them before the Court in the first place,” said Judge Berens. “This Initiative will assist the Court by ensuring that all available mental health and community resources can be accessed by those persons with mental illness who are on Community Control probationary supervision.”

The County Commissioners designated the Common Pleas Court to convene a diverse work group of local organizations and individual leaders who are committed to furthering the goal of

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responsibly reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in our jails. If interested in becoming more involved in the SteppingUp Initiative, please contact Angel Sanderson, Director of Adult Probation at [asanderson@co.fairfield.oh.us](mailto:asanderson@co.fairfield.oh.us) or Valerie Carpico, Reentry Coordinator, at [vjcarpico@sheriff.fairfield.oh.us](mailto:vjcarpico@sheriff.fairfield.oh.us).

More information about the SteppingUp Initiative can be found on its website: <https://stepuptogether.org/>.



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