



MESA COUNTY PRESS RELEASE

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MESA COUNTY LEADS INNOVATION BEHIND SCIENTIFIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRETRIAL EVALUATIONS

County Given National Award for Evidence-Based Pretrial Initiative

GRAND JUNCTION, CO August 28, 2013— The Mesa County Evidence-Based Pretrial Initiative was recently awarded the prestigious NACo Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The stakeholders group consisted of local judges, prosecutors, public and private defense lawyers, criminal justice practitioners from Mesa County Criminal Justice Services, and law enforcement personnel from the Mesa County Sheriff's Department.

This achievement award was given to Mesa County for the innovative, collaborative design of new bond guidelines and pretrial practices, including the implementation of a scientific evaluation, which categorizes the public safety risk and the potential to fail to appear in court for defendants in the pre-trial phase of the justice system.

Growing research has shown that there is no correlation between money bonds based on criminal charges and public safety rates, which has created a demand to establish a scientifically valid pretrial decision process. Colorado responded to this demand by beginning a scientific study on this initiative about six years ago, when contributors from ten Colorado counties began amassing information related to what extenuating factors led to a defendant's risk to reoffend prior to court trial. The researchers published the results of the study in 2012, which narrowed down the highest predictive factors for pretrial misconduct to 12 items. They found that over half of these factors focus on the criminal history of the defendant, while the other factors focus on community stability, past alcohol issues, mental health stability, etc. These factors contribute to an empirical risk profile that is assigned to each defendant. The new risk profile is called the Colorado Pretrial Assessment Tool (CPAT).

After this study was published in 2012, Mesa County Pretrial Services immediately began working on developing a Pretrial Services report that would incorporate this new science. The local system stakeholder's group worked with Mesa County Pretrial Services to approve a final product that was collaboratively approved and implemented on July 1, 2012. This risk profile is now completed on all defendants who are booked into the jail on new criminal charges, and a copy is provided to the prosecution, defense and the judges. This collaborative workgroup then subsequently developed new



bond guidelines, supervision standards for defendants under supervision and violation response guidelines, all of which are based on the CPAT empirical risk profiles.

Through the creation of a computerized pretrial assessment tool in 2012, which was accomplished at no additional cost to tax payers, Mesa County was the first county in the state, and among the first in the country, to implement an evidence based evaluation on defendants.

In July 2013, NACo presented Commissioner John Justman the award at its annual conference in Fort Worth, Texas. “We are keeping prison populations down while protecting the community,” Justman said. Tim Murray, Executive Director of the Pretrial Justice Institute in Washington D.C., told NACo that in his career in pretrial justice, “Mesa County is among the best” of the jurisdictions he has observed. He went on to say that, “In just the past two years, Mesa County pretrial justice stakeholders have accomplished what many jurisdictions have taken many years to do or have not been able to do at all.” Murray went on to congratulate the efforts of Mesa County in implementing better pretrial practices and strongly supported Mesa County obtaining the award.

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