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**Essex Sheriff’s Department to join state pilot program and will work with U.S Attorney’s Office to address opioid crisis.**

Sheriff Kevin F. Coppinger announced today that Essex County will work with U. S. Attorney’s office and will join the state pilot program to explore expanding Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) to deal with inmates who are addicted to opioids.

Sheriff Coppinger recently met with United States Attorney Andrew Lelling to discuss best practices for the proper implementation of MAT while addressing the operational, safety and security concerns of correctional facilities. Coppinger stated, “I am pleased and encouraged by the US Attorney’s willingness to work collaboratively with Essex County Sheriff’s Department to help develop best practices for the proper care of inmates in need of treatment while addressing the operational, safety and security concerns of our facilities.”

In addition, Sheriff Coppinger formally asked the Legislature to amend the Governor’s Care Act to include Essex County in the Pilot Program to develop an implementation plan to facilitate the delivery of medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder at county correctional facilities located in Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, Middlesex and Norfolk counties.

The Pilot Program was the result of the Massachusetts Sheriffs’ Association working with the State Legislature to craft a statewide pilot program to provide medication assisted treatment. The goal of this initiative, contained in the state’s latest opioid legislation, is to develop best practices for a MAT treatment program in a jail or prison setting and foster innovation in corrections in efforts to increase public safety, improve public health, and save lives.

In addition to administering medication while individuals are incarcerated, the sheriffs’ offices will provide behavioral health counseling and work with the inmates to build comprehensive treatment plans for when they are released. Key government stakeholders will work in collaboration with the sheriffs’ offices, including the Department of Public Health, Executive Office of Public Safety and Security and the Office of Medicaid.

“Clearly this is a complicated issue. We understand the seriousness of this issue and want to do it right,” said Sheriff Coppinger. “After carefully considering the options to best address the health and safety concerns of all inmates of Essex County, our department will be working with the U.S. Attorney’s office and the Pilot Program to determine the best approaches to combat this insidious disease within our correctional institutions. Our goal remains to provide the best services to those incarcerated while maintaining a safe and secure facility for all.”

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