



Center for Law and Justice

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**Albany Police Make 300<sup>th</sup> LEAD Diversion;  
Albany LEAD Announces Social Contact Referrals**

Albany Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (Albany LEAD) has now achieved its 300<sup>th</sup> arrest diversion and will soon add a new referral process to connect individuals who are thought to experience substance use, mental illness, homelessness and poverty with dedicated case managers who help them address those concerns.

On July 16, Albany Police responded to a report of an alleged theft at a Central Avenue retail business. A traditional police response would have led to an arrest and potential prosecution for petit larceny. Instead, the LEAD program – first implemented in Albany in April 2016 – made it possible for officers to offer diversion from the criminal legal system and the alternative of connection to Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services case managers. The individual who otherwise could have been arrested, and the potential complainant in the case, agreed to the diversion as is required under LEAD procedures. The individual who was diverted to LEAD indicated that he would welcome help in dealing with substance abuse issues.

Albany LEAD’s quarterly reports on arrests and diversions provide detailed figures on race/ethnicity in diversions as part of ongoing monitoring of potential disparities. The [most recent quarterly report](#), which includes cumulative data on diversions from April 2016 through March 2022, shows 162 diversions of white individuals during that period (54.5 percent of all diversions), 112 of Black individuals (37.7 percent) and 18 of Hispanic individuals (6.1 percent). 2021 was the first year in which Black individuals represented the largest racial/ethnic category for Albany LEAD diversions, with 27 of the total 55. Still, racial disparities remain in diversion totals since 2016 and in overall arrests, underscoring the importance of prioritizing further steps to address such inequities.

Albany LEAD is also moving forward with creation of a second, additional pathway to LEAD services, social contact referrals, in addition to the pre-arrest diversions that have been in place since 2016. Social contact referrals are used to more proactively address unnecessary contact with the criminal legal system in cases where no arrest is imminent but an individual meets Albany LEAD’s target population goals or a previous arrest may represent a missed opportunity for diversion. Because Albany LEAD prioritizes pre-arrest diversion as the preferred entry point, missed opportunities for diversion will continue to be analyzed by the Data Committee, and will be evaluated through quarterly data and brought to the Policy Coordinating Group (PCG), the initiative’s governing body, for review and consideration in policy discussions. The PCG is made

up of government, community and business leaders from the Albany County District Attorney's Office, Albany County Executive's Office, Albany County Sheriff's Office, Albany Mayor's Office, Albany Police Department, Central District Management Association, and The Center for Law and Justice.

Social contact referrals may be made by actors in the criminal legal system including police officers, public defenders, judges, prosecutors, probation officers and others. When there are more referrals than there are available case management slots, referrals will be prioritized to target individuals with the highest and most critical needs and with the imperative of addressing criminal legal system racial disparities. Other factors in such prioritization may include the specific needs of the individual, available capacity of local systems addressing those needs, and the individual's expressed interest in working with case managers.

"The 300<sup>th</sup> Albany LEAD diversion is an important milestone in our ongoing work to transform public safety and to help individuals who experience substance use, mental illness, homelessness and poverty," said Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan. "Social contact referrals provide an important additional way to reduce engagement with the criminal legal system and to prioritize communities that historically have been underserved."

"Albany County and our partners continue to lead the way when it comes to criminal justice reform and smart policing through our innovative LEAD program, and this milestone is proof. This initiative ensures that more low-level offenders dealing with mental health challenges, addiction, poverty and homelessness are connected with needed programs and services while freeing up law enforcement resources for real public safety threats," said Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy. "As we continue to divert more individuals away from incarceration, it is critical that our focus remains on racial equity, and I'm proud that we saw an improvement in terms of disparities in these diversions last year."

"As members of law enforcement, we should always be mindful that we can improve public safety in a meaningful and significant way when we commit resources to positive public health outcomes," said Albany County District Attorney P. David Soares. "LEAD has merged the disciplines of public safety and public health for the benefit of both the recipients of treatment services, and their loved ones. Police and service providers are LEADing the way!"

"While we are pleased to join in celebrating the significant milestone of diverting 300 people from arrest through the LEAD program, we recognize that we have only begun to accomplish that which is needed to prevent crime, reduce mass incarceration, promote public safety, and eliminate the serious racial disparity that exists in diversions and arrests in the city," said Center for Law and Justice Executive Director Dr. Alice P. Green. "The Center for Law and Justice believes that a new level of pre-arrest diversions can be achieved under the capable guidance and leadership of LEAD's new project managers."

Albany LEAD has also released its Annual Report for 2021, available [here](#).

Additional information about Albany LEAD is available at [www.albanylead.org](http://www.albanylead.org) and on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/albanylead/>.

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