

# NEWSRELEASE

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## **Two state agencies aim to help mentally ill offenders**

HELENA – In an effort to improve services for mentally ill offenders in Montana, two state agencies have collaborated to create a position with responsibility for better planning and coordination of programs available in prisons and communities across the state.

Deb Matteucci, executive director and development director for the Montana Mental Health Association, will be the first state behavioral health program facilitator, beginning July 17. She will work with both the Department of Corrections and the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

Her primary tasks will be to ensure offenders receive appropriate and consistent mental health care throughout their involvement in the criminal justice and corrections systems, help identify treatment resources required by offenders and create a seamless network of services for those in need.

“We are embarking on a new frontier in how corrections and public health deal with the growing problem of mentally ill offenders,” Corrections Director Mike Ferriter said. “We have an obligation to care for these individuals and to do so in a way that will help them stay on the right side of the law and remain productive citizens of Montana.”

DPHHS Director Joan Miles said she and her staff are excited about “this innovative and collaborative project” with the Department of Corrections.

“We believe this will greatly improve services for people who are in the corrections system, and we hope it will also reduce the number of repeat offenders and help to provide a way out of that system,” Miles said. “We’re delighted that someone as qualified as Deb Matteucci has stepped forward to accept this challenge.”

A Kalispell native, Matteucci, 37, said she is looking forward to assisting a part of the offender population that faces “enormous obstacles in trying to get their lives back on the right track.”

“If we can do a better job of putting those people in touch with the mental health and addictions treatment they so desperately need, I believe we can salvage some lives and keep some of them from returning to the corrections system,” she said.

Matteucci will work with county jails, local law enforcement officers, probation and parole officers, mental health centers, addiction treatment programs and DPHHS treatment staff. She will identify and work to abolish any gaps found in service.

The cooperation between the two departments makes sense, she said. Corrections provides some mental health services to offenders behind bars, and the health agency provides services to those on probation or parole through community programs, she explained. But too often, the services are not jointly planned by the departments and the treatments employed by one agency differ from those supplied by the other, Matteucci said.

Her work will benefit offenders at Montana State Prison, Montana Women’s Prison, regional prisons at Glendive and Great Falls, Crossroads Correctional Center at Shelby, the DUI-treatment programs at Warm Springs and Glendive, Treasure State Correctional Training Center near Deer Lodge, on probation or parole, and in pre-release centers.

Matteucci will be paid \$53,500 a year.

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