RESOLUTION

NEW JERSEY STATE ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

SUPPORTING LEGISLATION CREATING ASSISTED OUTPATIENT TREATMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESSES

WHEREAS, the role of New Jersey law enforcement officers in responding to serious crises involving people with severe mental illnesses is continually increasing; the safety of law enforcement officers and citizens, particularly those who are mentally ill, is seriously jeopardized; and an inordinate amount of law enforcement resources are being expended for this purpose at a time when we can least afford it; and

WHEREAS, nationally, people with severe mental illnesses are nearly four times more likely to be killed in altercations with police. Too often these altercations arise because a person with a severe mental illness stops taking their medication, as illustrated by a recent tragedy in New Jersey in which a man with schizophrenia was fatally shot when he lunged with a knife at a police officer; and

WHEREAS, three times already in 2004, law enforcement officers have responded to mentally ill individuals falsely claiming to have bombs. In two of the cases, police SWAT teams were held at bay for several hours, and in the third, Route 80 was closed for nearly two hours, all tremendous burdens on personnel and budgetary resources; and

WHEREAS, current law in New Jersey prevents families, law enforcement officers, and mental health professionals from helping a person who refuses treatment for severe mental illness until the person becomes dangerous, and also limits the remedy that judges have to ordering inpatient hospitalization, unlike other state laws that allow judges to court order outpatient mental health services *before* a crisis occurs; and

WHEREAS, 42 other states have laws that allow for court-ordered outpatient treatment (also known as "assisted outpatient treatment") for people with severe mental illnesses who refuse treatment, in most cases because the illness prevents them from recognizing that they are ill; and
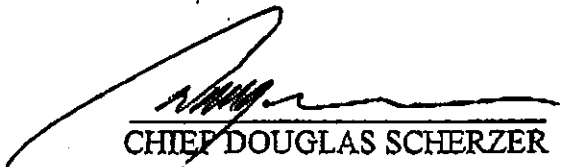
WHEREAS, empirical evidence from studies and states using assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) shows that AOT is effective in reducing incidents of hospitalization, homelessness, arrests and incarcerations, victimization, and violent episodes among people with severe mental illnesses who otherwise refuse treatment. AOT also increases treatment compliance and promotes long-term voluntary compliance for people with mental illnesses. Among other benefits, these outcomes reduce law enforcement contact with people with severe mental illnesses; and

WHEREAS, it is clear that providing for assisted outpatient treatment could have prevented some of our state's recent tragedies by ensuring early intervention and sustained treatment in the community for people who otherwise are unable or unwilling to access such treatment, particularly medication;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police that we support the passage of a bill providing for assisted outpatient treatment in New Jersey; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the incidents and tragedies cited above as well as the many not mentioned herein demonstrate the significant stake that law enforcement has in ensuring the efficacy of state funded mental health services in treating people with severe mental illnesses.

SIGNED: _____
CHIEF DOUGLAS SCHERZER
President

ATTEST: _____
MITCHELL C. SKLAR
Executive Director