

ALBANY LEAD

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion



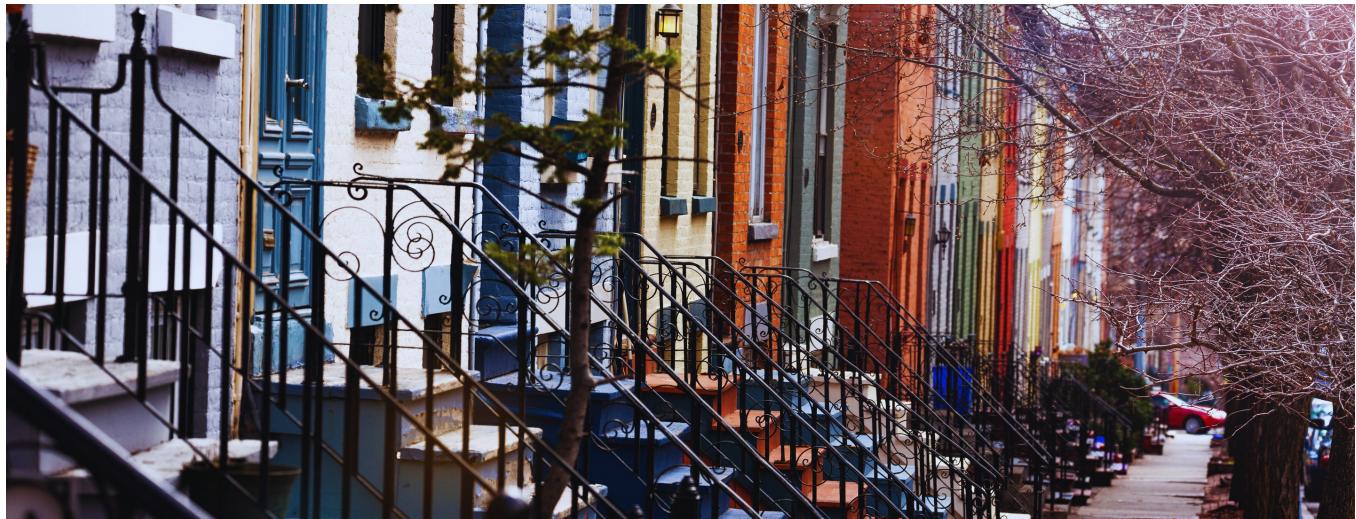
ANNUAL REPORT

June 2022

www.AlbanyLEAD.org

 @albanylead





FROM THE CO-PROJECT MANAGERS

Since April 2016, Albany Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) has diverted 299 individuals from arrest on low-level charges that may stem from substance use, mental illness, homelessness and/or poverty. Instead of facing arrest, prosecution and potential incarceration, these individuals connect with dedicated case managers to address underlying conditions and reduce risk of future engagement with the criminal legal system.

This Annual Report provides basic information about Albany LEAD, updates on major developments in the past year, data on arrests and diversions, and perspectives from key stakeholders. Albany LEAD is making significant progress even as it continues to face persistent challenges, including the imperative to do more to address racial inequity.

Albany LEAD is committed to keeping the community and public policy makers fully informed. This report is one of our efforts to fulfill that commitment. We welcome your comments and questions.

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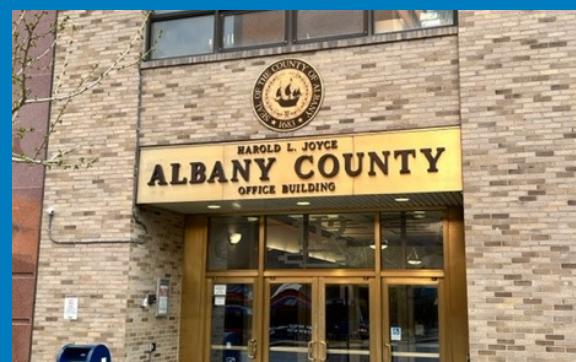
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WHAT IS ALBANY LEAD?

Albany LEAD works to reorient public safety efforts, reduce racial inequities, and improve public health by reducing engagement in the traditional punitive criminal legal system among individuals who are believed to struggle with mental illness, substance use, poverty, and homelessness.

Leaders of local government, community and business organizations are signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding that established Albany LEAD in 2015 (operations began in April 2016). These leaders make up the Albany LEAD Policy Coordinating Group, which governs the work of the initiative:

- Albany Mayor Kathy M. Sheehan
- Albany Police Chief Eric Hawkins
- Albany County District Attorney P. David Soares
- Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy
- Albany County Sheriff Craig D. Apple Sr.
- Center for Law and Justice Executive Director Alice P. Green
- Central District Management Association Executive Director Anthony Capece

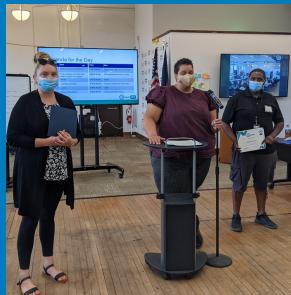


KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021



The September retreat at the Central District Management Association's STEAM Garden brought together LEAD policymakers, case managers, community leaders, representatives of the LEAD Support Bureau and other stakeholders for in-depth discussion of the initiative's status and potential steps forward.

The Policy Coordinating Group decided to implement a co-project manager structure to strengthen operational capacity; Jennie Huling and Bob Ward began work in June.

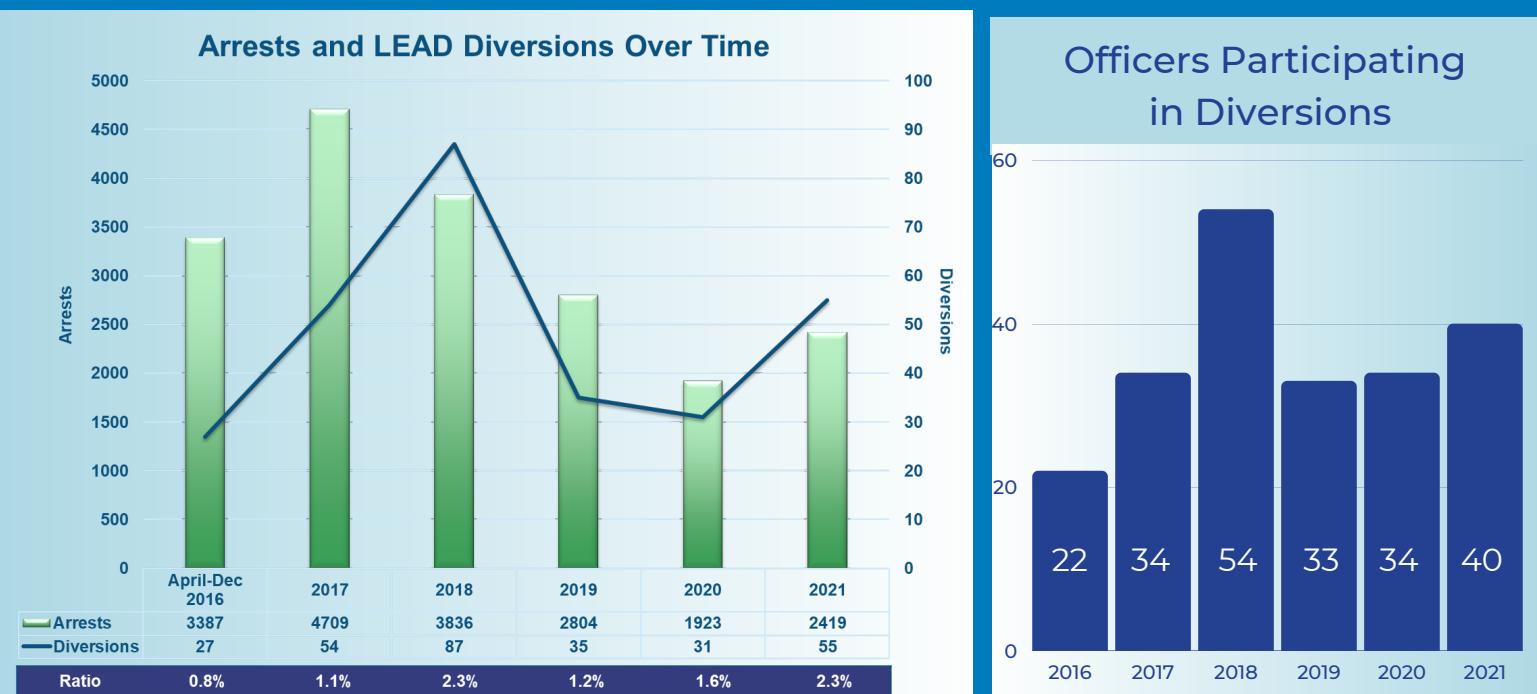


Funding from a federal COSSAP grant procured by Albany County supports Albany LEAD's overall work; a separate grant through New York State and Albany County made possible new case management capacity; the LEAD Support Bureau obtained private foundation funding for additional support.

A newly created Finance Committee and first-ever unified Albany LEAD budget strengthen financial planning and accountability.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021

Newly revised quarterly reports on Albany Police Department (APD) arrests and Albany LEAD diversions provide clearer, more detailed analysis of numbers of diversions, racial breakdowns of both arrests and diversions, and factors that may help spotlight additional opportunities for diversion going forward.



Total numbers of diversions (55) and of APD officers involved in diversions (40) during 2021 were both the second-highest annual figures in Albany LEAD's six years of operation.



City of Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan

"When Albany launched LEAD in 2016, we were among the first cities in the country to commit to helping low level offenders struggling with addiction, poverty, homelessness, and mental health challenges find the services they need, rather than arresting them. We've learned a lot along the way, and I remain committed to using that experience to evolve LEAD so that we can help even more people stay out of the criminal justice system and on a path to success."

THE OPERATIONAL WORKGROUP

One essential aspect of Albany LEAD is the Operational Workgroup. This passionate group of leaders from the criminal legal system, social service agencies, and various County offices comes together every two weeks to problem solve around barriers LEAD clients are experiencing. Examples could include difficulty accessing treatment, pending eviction, food insecurity, medical concerns, pending criminal charges, and more. The group assists LEAD case managers in supporting clients as they work toward their chosen goals.

Operational Workgroup members:

Albany County Department of Mental Health
Albany County Department of Probation
Albany County Department of Social Services
Albany County District Attorney's Office
Albany County Alternate Public Defender's Office
Albany County Public Defender's Office
Albany Police Department
Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services
The Center for Law and Justice
St. Catherine's Center for Children (Homeless Services)

Sergeant Benjamin Peterson, Albany Police Department



"LEAD has changed the way I do my job. Once a person realizes that we aren't going to arrest them and we are sympathetic to their situation, we can connect on a different level. This helps officers, the people we serve and the community change our perceptions of each other, becoming less contentious and more collaborative. Valuing LEAD diversions the same way we value arrests helps to transform police culture. Officers now understand the importance of helping certain people that break the law the same way we help the victims of these crimes."

CASE MANAGEMENT

LEAD emphasizes intensive, trauma-informed case management with a harm reduction focus, seeking to minimize negative health, social and legal impacts while understanding that behavioral change may take time.

In 2021 Catholic Charities implemented a new client database which facilitates improved tracking, analysis, and reporting of client experiences.

4 CASE MANAGERS

Albany LEAD has been staffed for years by two case managers and a case management supervisor. In early 2022 the initiative grew to add two additional case management positions.

167 INDIVIDUALS

Though there were 55 new diversions a total of 167 unique individuals were served by Albany LEAD in 2021.

Common services provided by case managers included:

- help accessing shelter and housing,
- connection with mental health services,
- connection with substance use services,
- help obtaining benefits,
- help obtaining identification (birth certificates, social security cards, and state identification), and
- resolution of legal charges.

Tara Madrid, LEAD Case Manager

"With LEAD, I've experienced ups, downs, and all-arounds. I have had the privilege of watching clients achieve their goals. However, I've also watched clients struggle with their lives in different ways, and I've had some unexpected, heartbreakingly client losses. Every day is different, but every single day, we get to meet everybody where they are at. I think LEAD's ultimate goal is to support wonderful people in realizing their own potential and acknowledging their self-worth."



CLIENT STORY

One LEAD client was diverted in 2017 for Criminal Possession of Controlled Substance. At the time of diversion, he was homeless, sleeping on the street or staying with friends. He asked for help seeking shelter and applying for Temporary Assistance.

This client also sought inpatient substance use treatment with assistance from LEAD case management. He completed both inpatient treatment, and outpatient recovery services. He also obtained Social Security Disability benefits, and secured permanent housing.

In November 2021, having been an “inactive” client since March of 2020, he contacted Diana Macy, LEAD Coordinator. The client reported, “I know I am done with the program, but I don’t know who else I can call.” He stated that although he had begun using crack and alcohol, he had “come too far to lose everything.” The client was reminded, “Once a LEAD client always a LEAD client.”

At his request LEAD brought him back to inpatient treatment, which he again successfully completed. Upon discharge he returned to his apartment. He has been engaged consistently with LEAD staff since returning home. Today, he reports no substance use, is employed, and loves his job.

Dr. Alice Green, Executive Director, The Center for Law and Justice



"The Center for Law and Justice has been directly involved with Albany LEAD development and operation for more than six years. We continue to broaden and strengthen our community engagement efforts through partnerships that include the LEAD Community Leadership Team. Together we inform, and listen to and report our community's concerns about pre-arrest diversions and the effective provision of human support services."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Center for Law and Justice coordinates community engagement for Albany LEAD. They also coordinate the Community Leadership Team (CLT), which advises on policies and practices of Albany LEAD.

The CLT is an independent body that serves to provide guidance, direction, and accountability for LEAD. The group consists of community leaders, people with lived experience, and other important voices in the community. Current CLT steering committee members have backgrounds in social work, activism, as school administrators, and social services providers. Along with their interest in the work they were specifically chosen for their breadth of knowledge and experience.



In carrying out its educational and community engagement functions with LEAD, the Center for Law and Justice continues to meet with community groups, develop informational materials, carry out opinion surveys, publish research reports, and engage in direct outreach to residents at their homes or on the street. With the advance of social media, this technology is increasingly being used to deliver important messages and information and receive community input and feedback on LEAD issues of concern.

The Center, with valuable input from the CLT and LEAD management, hopes to increase its involvement with community groups and stakeholders, individual residents, especially young people and those returning to our community from incarceration.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

While diversions in 2021 were the second-highest since Albany LEAD's inception, an encouraging sign of progress, numbers in the last quarter of 2021 and first quarter of 2022 were low (totaling 13 for the two quarters combined). Increasing pre-arrest diversions and reducing arrests remain mission critical.

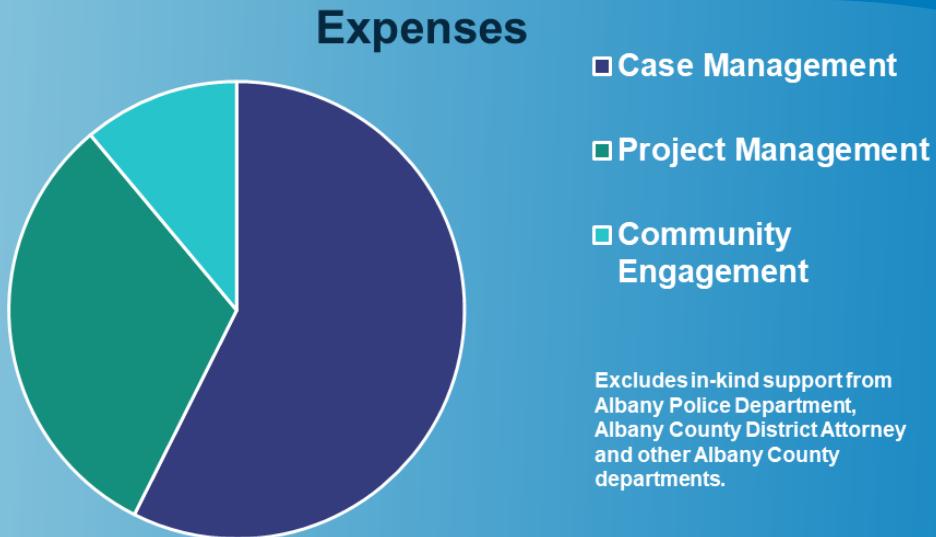
2021 was also the first year in which more Black than white individuals were diverted. Still, racial disparities remain in overall arrests and in diversion totals since 2016 – underscoring the importance of prioritizing further progress in these areas.

With newly approved funding from New York State, resources from two federal grants, and financial support from Albany County and the City of Albany as well as a private foundation, Albany LEAD's financial outlook is secure for 2021 and much improved for the immediately following years. However, long-term sustainability remains a concern.



ALBANY LEAD BUDGET

Staff costs for case managers who work directly with LEAD clients to address their service needs make up the largest part of Albany LEAD's \$831,000 budget for 2022.



Revenues

Albany LEAD has relied on a changing mix of private grants, federal funding, financial and in-kind support from the City of Albany and Albany County, and other temporary resources. In 2022, major funding includes:

- \$398,000 from two federal grants obtained by Albany County;
- \$300,000 from New York State;
- \$60,000 from the Albany County 2022 budget;
- \$80,000 from a private foundation grant to the LEAD Support Bureau;
- \$47,970 from Health Research Inc. (New York State);
- \$9,000 from the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region

Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy



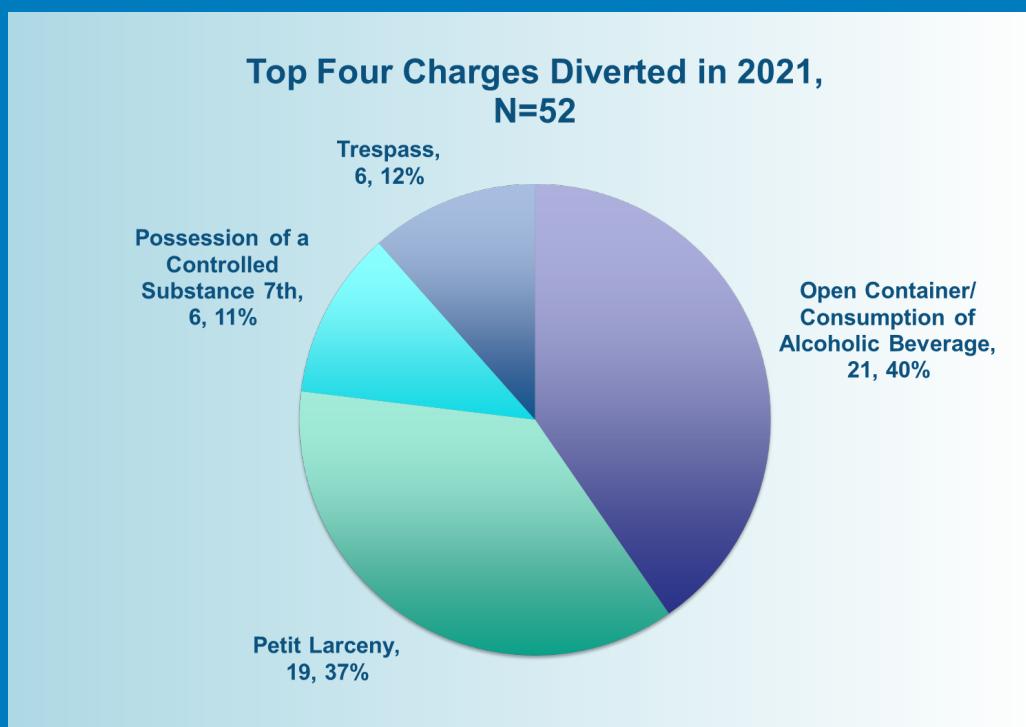
"For far too long our society has relied on incarceration to deal with substance abuse, mental illness and poverty, without any tangible public safety benefits to show for it. Our LEAD program is turning the page on the old ways of doing things by diverting individuals away from jails and into the programs and services they need to address the root causes of low level offenses. This innovative program works and it's earning the support of our federal and state partners who continue to help us fund its success and make it better than ever before."

KEY INDICATORS FOR 2021

Albany LEAD tracks the approximate number of unique individuals who were arrested and diverted each quarter by race. We also track the types of charges that were diverted.

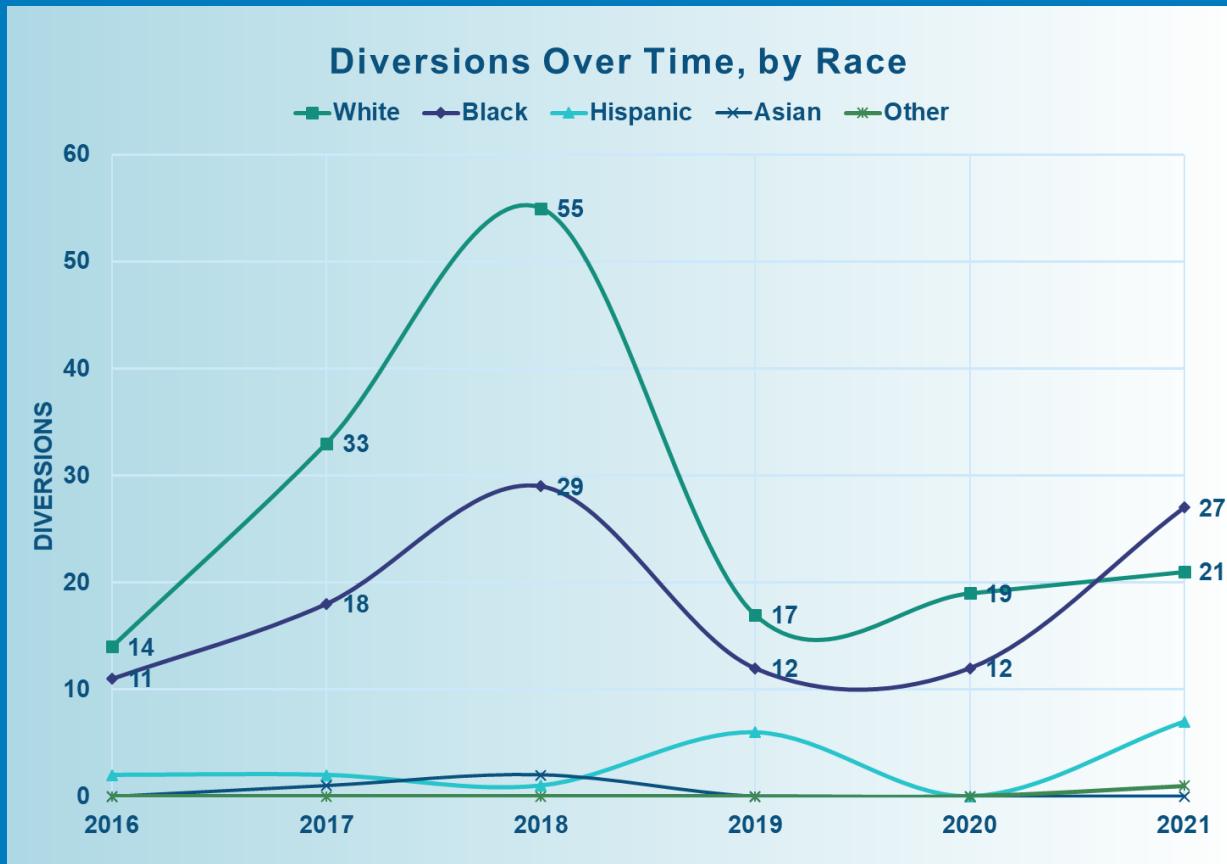


*(The chart above refers to unique individuals, not total arrests)



TRACKING RACIAL EQUITY

Albany LEAD also tracks diversions over time by race as this information helps us continually consider progress toward our racial equity goals.



Eric D. Hawkins, Albany Chief of Police



"Albany LEAD is a transformative program that promotes alternatives for dealing with individuals struggling with mental illness, addiction, or poverty. Police officers can now divert those individuals to support services instead of incarceration for certain low-level offenses. I wholeheartedly support Albany LEAD because it offers more effective and efficient solutions for handling social issues that often evolve to vicious cycles of experiences in our criminal justice system."

SO FAR IN 2022

**299
DIVERSIONS**

**NYS
FUNDING**

**SOCIAL
MEDIA AND
WEBSITE**

**ALBANY LEAD
OFFICES**

Albany LEAD has recorded 299 diversions since operations began in April 2016.

For the first time, the enacted New York State budget for 2022-23 includes funding for Albany LEAD. The \$300,000 grant reflects the strong support of Assembly Members John T. McDonald III and Patricia Fahy, and Senator Neil D. Breslin.

Albany LEAD social media launched in May and a dedicated website, www.AlbanyLEAD.org launched in June.

Project managers are now located in the Albany County Department of Mental Health building, 175 Green Street, Albany.

P. David Soares, Albany County District Attorney

"In Albany County we have come to appreciate the unique intersection between public safety and public health. We have established diversion off ramps and a continuum of care throughout the criminal justice system. LEAD presents a public health diversion off ramp prior to entering the system which benefits everyone. An evolved community cannot treat its chronic public health challenges solely with public safety measures. LEAD transcends traditional policing. It provides officers with a benevolent tool for low level offenders in place of arrest to benefit community members plagued by poverty, mental health challenges, addiction and homelessness."



POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Albany LEAD Policy Coordinating Group will continue to consider avenues to increase pre-arrest diversions including discussing current eligibility criteria.

The PCG will also consider additional avenues into Albany LEAD including referrals outside of a potential arrest situation.

Albany LEAD and the Albany Police Department are working on several projects to increase communication and decrease barriers to diversions. Projects include a quarterly LEAD update for officers, streamlining LEAD paperwork, and training updates.

Albany LEAD is also actively pursuing additional community partnerships with organizations whose mission and work relate to our own.



Renée Merges, Albany County Assistant District Attorney



"The expansion of the LEAD program is an exciting step forward for the future of public safety in Albany County. The participation of the Albany County District Attorney's Office in the program's current iteration, means we can more effectively meet people where they are, and better serve the community. The more tools law enforcement agencies have, the better equipped we are to reach the best outcomes for everyone involved."

The goals of the Albany LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) initiative are to reorient public safety efforts, reduce racial inequities, and improve public health by reducing engagement in the traditional punitive criminal legal system among individuals who are believed to struggle with mental illness, substance use, poverty, and homelessness.

