

John Vallely:

Although sometimes with convictions and sometimes with other forms of supervision, they are spared the more draconian prison sentences that were commonly handed out to people who were criminally justice involved, who had co-occurring disorders or mental health treatment needs that weren't being addressed or were being addressed incorrectly. We don't enter into this type of diversion without the complaining witness's consent in 99% of the cases. Many people who are the victims of crime are amenable to defendants being diverted or getting treatment because they understand, because they've encountered the defendant, this is a necessary step.

Information about the defendant is critical. People are so different. These are all individuals. These are not cookie cutter-type decisions. But I think one of the biggest myths is that we can't work with this population and that we just need to incarcerate them. Things are not perfect. There needs to be a broader response, a broader societal response to these issues. But if we're dealing with someone here in this bureau, in this office, something has gone wrong already.

I think what people should know is they should support funding for mental health access and care in the intercepts prior to the criminal justice involvement. We're training a new generation of prosecutors. I think there's been, in some ways, a cultural sea change in terms of evaluating cases. In our office, we're certainly doing more mental health diversion on serious felony cases than we had several years ago.