



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

JACK BARBER, M.D.  
INTERIM COMMISSIONER

DEPARTMENT OF  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

Post Office Box 1797  
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1797

Telephone (804) 786-3921  
Fax (804) 371-6638  
[www.dbhds.virginia.gov](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov)

June 16, 2017

To: Local & Regional Jail Administrators  
Fr: Michael Schaefer, Ph.D., ABPP  
Assistant Commissioner – Forensic Services  
Re: Screening for Mental Illness

During the 2017 session, the General Assembly included language in the Budget Bill (see Chapter 836, Item 70, Item J2) regarding jails conducting screening for the presence of mental illness. Specifically, the Budget Bill requires, *“Whenever a person is admitted to a local or regional correctional facility, the staff of the facility shall screen such person for mental illness using a scientifically validated instrument. The Commissioner of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services shall designate the instrument to be used for the screenings and such instrument shall be capable of being administered by an employee of the local or regional correctional facility, other than a health care provider, provided that such employee is trained in the administration of such instrument.”* The purpose of this communication is to share information about the designated instrument and to provide an update on the availability of training for staff on the use of the instrument(s).

DBHDS recommends that jails utilize the **Brief Jail Mental Health Screen (BJMHS)** to screen inmates for the presence of mental illness and/or the need for further behavioral health assessment. The BJMHS is within the public domain thus is free to use and can be copied as needed. Attached you will find a copy of the BJMHS. DBHDS recognizes that there have been some published studies suggesting the BJMHS is not as effective in identifying females who might be in need of further evaluation and for that reason some correctional facilities may opt to utilize the **Correctional Mental Health Screen (CMHS)** as an alternative tool. The CMHS has both a male version and a female version. Published studies have shown the male version of the CMHS to be as reliable as the BJMHS. Some studies have found that the CMHS for Women (CMHS-W) to be more reliable than the BJMHS, however there have been other publications which have suggested the BJMHS equally as useful as the CMHS(W) in detecting women at increased risk for need for behavioral healthcare services. DBHDS recognizes the CMHS as a scientifically validated instrument which can be used for screening. Attached you will find copies of the CMHS which similar to the BJMHS is within the public domain, is free to use, and can be copied as needed.

DBHDS recognizes that some jails utilize commercially published case management/booking software programs which have a mental health screening built into the existing software. If a jail uses such programs and wishes to have the screening tool imbedded in the program recognized by DBHDS as a scientifically validated instrument (as is required by the Budget Bill), you should submit your request to DBHDS. Your request should include the name of the screening tool, the publisher/manufacturer of the tool, and any published articles about the reliability and validity of the screening tool when used with jail based populations. Your request should be directed to: [Michael.schaefer@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:Michael.schaefer@dbhds.virginia.gov).

The budget bill references the need for staff who administer the screening tool(s) to have been trained in the use of the tool. As many jails already have been utilizing the BJMHS we assume that many of your staff have already received training. For those who have not been trained or who would benefit from refresher training, DBHDS has developed a 1 ½ hour training module covering the topic of behavioral health screening and the use of the BJMHS & the CMHS. DBHDS will be offering the training both via web-based presentations and live presentations. We will be applying for Partial In-Service (PIC) Credits through the Department of Criminal Justice Services to provide to staff completing the training. Training announcements will be sent through the Virginia Sheriffs Association, the Virginia Association of Regional Jails, and the State Compensation Board.

Finally, DBHDS would like to proactively thank the jails for their assistance in implementing this new standard of practice. We understand jail staff have multiple responsibilities with limited resources and that this adds yet another responsibility to the jails. However, we are optimistic that implementing a uniform, scientifically validated screening process across the Commonwealth will greatly improve the outcomes for individuals with behavioral health challenges who become involved in the criminal justice system.