



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News release

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New pact allows for Kenosha County mental health detentions at nearby Lake County facility

Kenosha County Executive Samantha Kerkman today signed into effect an intergovernmental agreement that enables Kenosha County and its local law enforcement agencies to send involuntary mental health detentions to a nearby facility in Illinois.

This will allow for some hospitalizations to occur closer to home, providing greater convenience to families and a cost savings to the county and law enforcement agencies, Kerkman said.

Under the mutual aid agreement, Chapter 51 mental health detentions may be sent to Lake Behavioral Hospital in Waukegan, as well as to the in-state providers that have been used to date.

“This agreement was six years in the making and included involvement by our local municipalities, the Kenosha County Board and the Illinois General Assembly,” Kerkman said. “We as a county are always looking to improve quality, accessibility and efficiency of care for people in need, and this agreement is a shining example of what we can accomplish.”

Kerkman signed the agreement during an informal event in her office including Sheriff David Zoerner, County Board supervisors and members of the county’s behavioral health and human services staff.

Zoerner lauded the agreement, which will cut down on labor-intensive transports of patients from Kenosha County to the state’s Winnebago Mental Health Institute in Oshkosh — currently the county’s primary placement destination.

“This allows our local law enforcement agencies to spend more time in our community as opposed to transporting patients across the state,” Zoerner said. “It also allows our community residents to be treated closer to home, near their family supports. And it gets our citizens at a time of crisis to a setting of help, faster.”

Kenosha County Behavioral Health Manager Kari Foss said detentions to Winnebago may take up to 16 hours of two law enforcement officers' time, including taking the individual into custody, transporting to a local emergency department to identify care needs, and making the five-to-six-hour round trip to Oshkosh.

Of the 238 mental health detentions made by local law enforcement in 2022, 200 were sent to Winnebago. Foss said that was due to a lack of available beds at southeastern Wisconsin providers closer to Kenosha County.

"Kenosha County remains committed to providing our residents with services that are at the least restrictive level of care, and that keep them as close to home and their natural supports as possible," Foss said. "This unprecedented contract with an inpatient facility in Illinois, only about 25 miles away, will make involuntary inpatient psychiatric hospitalization a more effective and accessible experience."

Chief Executive Officer Cindy DeMarco said Lake Behavioral Hospital, a 161-bed psychiatric facility, welcomes the opportunity to expand mental health care to the communities of southeastern Wisconsin through this collaborative partnership with Kenosha County.

"Through our combined efforts, residents in need of inpatient psychiatric care will be given the opportunity to stay within their local communities to receive the needed care," DeMarco said. "Access to mental health treatment is essential for residents of all communities, and through this partnership this possibility is now a reality."

The Kenosha County Board approved the agreement on a unanimous vote earlier this week. The other municipalities whose law enforcement departments will also participate also must approve the agreement. The Village of Twin Lakes has already done so and the Village of Pleasant Prairie is scheduled to act on it next week, with the City of Kenosha expected to soon follow.

County Board Supervisor Daniel Gaschke celebrated the agreement. Gaschke attended today's signing event along with board Chairman Gabe Nudo, Vice Chair Erin Decker and Amanda Nedweski, a state representative and county supervisor.

"Having worked in the mental health industry for several years — and having served in the past on Kenosha County's Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Committee — I am thrilled to see this partnership come to fruition," Gaschke said. "This will allow us to better serve our community, especially those in times of greatest need."

More information about Kenosha County's Division of Aging, Disability and Behavioral Health Services is available at <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/262/Aging-Disability-Behavioral-Health>, and more information about Lake Behavioral hospital may be found at <https://www.lakebehavioralhospital.com>.

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