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Middlesex Sheriff's Office marks first anniversary of groundbreaking young adult unit with report detailing successes

BILLERICA, Mass. – The Middlesex Sheriff's Office and Vera Institute of Justice today celebrated the first anniversary of a groundbreaking new initiative designed to transform conditions of incarceration and better prepare incarcerated young adults (ages 18-24) for reentry.

Young adults represent 10 percent of the nation's population, but 21 percent of the adult prison admissions each year.



Working in conjunction with Vera's Restoring Promise Initiative, the MSO launched the People Achieving Change Together (P.A.C.T.) program in February 2018 in an effort to tackle the issue of emerging adults involved in the criminal justice system. The MSO was the first sheriff's office in the nation to launch this type of initiative with Vera's support and the second correctional facility overall.

"To launch this unit, we had to reimagine what corrections looked like," said Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian. "We had weeks of new and intensive

training for staff who applied to work in the unit, began allowing contact visits, implemented new programming and allowed young adults to help design community spaces within the unit. The result has been a safer environment for both our staff and our inmates, one that is based on a pact to respect and help one another."

As part of the anniversary, the MSO and the Vera Institute released a paper documenting their experiences during the first year of operation. The paper highlights some initial findings including data showing P.A.C.T. participants were far less likely to be issued a disciplinary report (13 percent) than their counterparts (33 percent) living outside the unit - an outcome attributed by inmates to the unit's environment and high level of staff engagement.

"We're grateful for the leadership of Sheriff Koutoujian, Scot Chaput, Cristal Swiminer, staff and incarcerated young men at the Middlesex County Jail for their courage and vision in the creation of the P.A.C.T Unit," said Alex Frank, Project Director for the Restoring Promise Initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice. "What's happening here in Middlesex is truly exceptional, but it shouldn't be the exception. Today,