

Promising Practices

A Promising Deflection and Diversion Program: Pennsylvania's Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative

Deflection and diversion programs that route individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) away from the criminal justice system can be a key method of ensuring individuals in need receive appropriate support and services. Delaware County's implementation of Pennsylvania's Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative (LETI) diverts individuals from the court system while providing a tailored supportive approach to treatment.

LETI, as a state model, is both a deflection and diversion program. Participants can be routed through the courtroom or police interactions. The LETI program [began in 2018](#) as a response to the state's high rate of overdose deaths. It has since expanded to [encapsulate 28 counties](#), including Delaware County, which was added in 2021. However, [Delaware County's LETI program](#) offers a unique approach—each participant is paired with a client advocate through a successful partnership with the Delaware County Public Defender's Office.

LETI in Delaware County

In Delaware County, clients with drug-related charges are eligible for participation in LETI—upon acceptance into the program, participants are assigned a client advocate. Client advocates help participants successfully complete the program—they may attend court, refer or assess for mental health treatment if needed, and assist with benefits, jobs, housing or anything else participants may need. Importantly, advocates,

who are provided by [Partners for Justice](#) through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, can help negotiate with participants' employers by writing letters of support to help clients keep their jobs during treatment. The advocates generally provide an individualized support structure, including referrals for job training programs or other resources. Upon successful completion of treatment, charges are dropped.



However, Pennsylvania's LETI isn't just a deflection and diversion program—importantly, anyone suffering from substance misuse can reach out to law enforcement, including probation and parole officers, without the threat of arrest, to be referred to treatment. This ["open station door" framework](#) de-stigmatizes substance misuse, improves access to treatment and allows for strong partnerships between law enforcement and the behavioral health community. One other key component of LETI is guaranteed transportation to substance misuse treatment—which can be a huge barrier to access.

As of early 2024, the Delaware County LETI program has diverted over 140 people, with 52 percent of participants completing the program. But the program in Delaware County is one of many across the state—together they act as a force multiplier, improving access to quality treatment. The LETI program is a promising model because anyone can reach out to or speak with law enforcement to seek treatment without fearing arrest, the program allows for both diversion and deflection components, and in Delaware County, the client advocate role adds an additional element of support, providing individualized and holistic care.