NACo releases pretrial justice guide for counties

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Pretrial Justice Institute have released a new guide to assist counties in planning and launching pretrial justice programs in rural communities, home to 51 million Americans.

“The Delivery of Pretrial Justice in Rural Areas: A Guide for Rural County Officials” was released as part of NACo’s Smart Justice Symposium, Jan. 31-Feb. 1 in Los Angeles, which explored justice and public safety priorities such as juvenile justice reform, workforce development, jail population management and related jail healthcare issues.

According to the Pretrial Justice Institute, the nation’s only nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring informed pretrial decision-making for safe communities, pretrial services are programs that help judicial officers make bail decisions by providing information, assessments of risk, and in some cases, supervision for those released to the program. The judicial officer then incorporates other information, such as the facts and circumstances of the alleged offense, in reaching a decision. Pretrial services can play a central role in plans to reduce jail crowding and preserve public safety.

The NACo guide outlines the obstacles many small counties face when considering pretrial justice programs and offers recommendations to overcome these challenges. Typical challenges include:

- Long distances for defendants to travel for supervision appointments and to attend court
- Low case volumes that move system stakeholders to search for multi-county approaches to providing justice
- Limited personnel and infrastructure require staff to perform multiple roles, and
- Lack of community-based experts and resources.

“To establish or enhance pretrial justice in rural areas requires leadership, collaboration, and a series of next steps for county officials,” the guide suggests. “A crucial lesson that emerges from successful rural efforts is the importance of collaboration on multiple levels—multi-county partnerships, state and local governments, and local agencies in rural communities.”

For more information, contact Maeghan Gilmore at mgilmore@naco.org or 202.942.4261.

###

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.