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CONTACT: Raúl E. Burciaga, Director, Legislative Council Service, (505) 986-4600

Statewide Forum on Public Safety

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Legislature's interim Courts, Corrections and Justice Committee (CCJ) and Criminal Justice Reform Subcommittee (CJRS), in partnership with the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, will host a statewide forum on public safety on Tuesday, June 19, to address challenges concerning the criminal justice system in New Mexico.

Representative Gail Chasey (D-Bernalillo) and Senator Richard C. Martinez (D-Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Sandoval and Santa Fe), co-chairs, CCJ, and Representative Antonio Maestas (D-Bernalillo) and Senator Sander Rue (R-Bernalillo), co-chairs, CJRS, will provide introductory remarks at the event beginning at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday in Room 307 of the New Mexico State Capitol. Carl Reynolds, senior legal and policy advisor, CSG Justice Center, will moderate the event.

"It is crucial, as we move forward with criminal justice reform in New Mexico, that we understand and address the full spectrum of the problem," Representative Chasey said.

"Combating public safety issues with the same tough-on-crime approaches have proven historically deleterious, rarely taking into consideration behavioral health needs, rehabilitation efforts, or the impact on families and communities. For example, I am concerned with New Mexico's increasing population of female inmates."

Panelists will include county and state leaders, community advocates, criminal justice

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and mental health experts and corrections and behavioral health practitioners. The forum will be broken up into four sessions, covering: behavioral health initiatives; crime reduction strategies; factors contributing to recidivism; and consequences of criminal conviction upon release.

"We must understand that all of these initiatives are geared to increase public safety. Some of these proposals can easily be painted as 'soft on crime' in a sound bite, but these data-driven solutions are actually smart on crime. The public safety focus needs to include how former inmates can become successful and productive citizens," stated Representative Maestas. "These measures have been proven elsewhere to reduce crime, and it's time for New Mexico to get on board."

Like many states across the nation, New Mexico has seen an increase in drug overdose deaths over the last decade. New Mexico has also experienced a nine percent increase in the reported violent crime rate between 2006 and 2016. The Corrections Department projects that the state prison population will increase 14 percent over the next decade. State leaders are interested in strategies to hold low-level offenders accountable, while minimizing the need for costly incarceration and considering the major barriers to successful reentry into society.

"The Council of State Governments Justice Center has researched and compiled a lot of data on criminal justice reform, so we can look at ways that other states have reduced prison populations and recidivism, collaborate with experts across New Mexico and implement similar policies," Senator Rue said. "The organization has made a real effort to understand the nuances of what is going on in New Mexico, because we are very unique, and recommend strategies to best fit the needs of our state."

"We are encouraging everybody to attend, the public, members of the legislature," added Senator Martinez. "This meeting will set the course for criminal justice reform in New Mexico."

The CSG Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that provides nonpartisan, evidence-based strategies to improve public safety.

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