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### Volusia opens door to new mental-health service at jail

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DELAND -- Volusia County corrections could have a local agency providing mental-health services in the jail by Jan. 1.

The Volusia County Council and County Manager Jim Dinneen made a surprise move Thursday to take steps to open the mental-health portion of the jail health care contract to Act Corp. The arrangement could be a subcontract with Prison Health Services or a separate contract with the county.

The move brought praise from local community leaders who for months have called for a change. County administration and the corrections division were originally recommending extending Prison Health Services' overall contract for 18 months until further review can be made. Its contract ends Sept. 30.

Prison Health Services, which along with the county has faced criticism and lawsuits over the care of inmates, will negotiate over the next 45 days with officials at Act and Stewart-Marchman Center, the area's main mental-health and substance-abuse providers, which are merging services in October. Prison Health Services will continue providing mental-health care until the county approves a new arrangement.

In the meantime, the council will move forward at its next meeting Sept. 18 to approve a new three-year contract with Prison Health Services for the medical part of the contract that excludes mental-health care.

Since Act many times treats the clients that end up in the jail and when they leave, County Chairman Frank Bruno said, "If we can put this together, it will be a win-win for the whole community."

Councilman Jack Hayman said he's had serious concerns with Prison Health Services. He agreed working with Act is a "first step in the right direction."

The Rev. Jimmie Moore, of Allen Chapel AME Church in Daytona Beach, thanked the council on behalf of members of FAITH, Fighting Against Injustice Towards Harmony. The group of church-based activists called for a local mental-health agency to take over the contract and for more humane treatment in the jail. The group also wants a substance-abuse program put back into the jail, which council members would also like to see as part of the mental-health contract.

"We do recognize improvements have been made. However, there are still more improvements that must be made," Moore said. "We are here for those who do not have a voice."

Janet Miller, CEO of Act, said Act, which provided mental-health services in the jail prior to Prison Health Services, has a passion for serving people with mental illnesses "whether they are behind the walls of the jail or in the community."

Glenn Storch, a local attorney representing Prison Health Services, said the company has listened to the concerns of the community and is in favor of working with Act and "increasing its standard of care." The company's current contract for overall health services is about \$7.3 million annually.

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