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Community Resources for Justice announces new President and CEO

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BOSTON – Community Resources for Justice’s Board of Directors is pleased to announce that it has unanimously selected Deborah M. O’Brien, RN, MPA, to serve as CRJ’s new President and CEO, effective Sept. 1, 2020.

Ms. O’Brien brings 25 years of experience working to improve the lives of at-risk individuals, most recently as President and Chief Operating Officer at The Providence Center in Providence, Rhode Island. She will succeed John Larivee, who will retire in August after 46 years with the organization and its predecessor, including more than two decades as CRJ’s chief executive.

“CRJ would not be what it is today without John’s leadership and the endless energy he brought to creating real solutions that improved the lives of more individuals than we will ever know,” said Scott Harshbarger, Chair of CRJ’s Board of Directors. “Deborah shares that same energy and focus on people first. Her skills make her not just a good fit for an incredibly complex role, but the right fit. We are thrilled to welcome her to Boston and to CRJ.”

For over 140 years, CRJ has addressed critical social justice issues through policy reform and high-quality services to formerly incarcerated individuals and to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. CRJ is a leader in policy work and direct services in Massachusetts and throughout the nation, driven by its long history and dedication to its mission of changing lives and building stronger, safer communities.

Ms. O’Brien is joining CRJ after three years as the President and COO at The Providence Center, a leader in providing treatment and supportive services to children, adolescents, and adults affected by psychiatric illness, emotional problems, or addiction. The organization is the largest provider of substance use treatment in Rhode Island’s prison system.

Ms. O’Brien’s brings to her new role strategic vision, seasoned leadership experience, and a collaborative style, making her ideally suited to lead CRJ forward. Her personal and professional experience align with CRJ’s values.

“Working with at-risk individuals, and those who cannot advocate for themselves is at the heart of what I have done throughout my career,” Ms. O’Brien said. “Joining CRJ represents an opportunity to bring my experience and values to a tremendously talented and dedicated team working to create real, lasting, and positive change at a time when it’s so sorely needed.”

The board’s selection of Ms. O’Brien as CRJ’s next President and CEO followed a comprehensive, nationwide search that attracted significant interest from a diverse pool of impressive candidates.

“We sought someone with demonstrated experience leading an organization of compatible purpose and complexity through growth and change, driven by continuous quality and service delivery, and a deep commitment to building partnerships,” said CRJ board member Sandra Bailly, who served as chair of the search committee. “Deborah’s impressive resume, expertise, and demonstrated commitment to serving critical and often-overlooked populations made her the ideal candidate.”

Ms. O’Brien has over 25 years of experience in management and executive leadership through her work with The Providence Center, Rhode Island Hospital, and South Shore Mental Health Center in Charlestown, Rhode Island. She has led many innovative programs and services at the intersection of healthcare delivery, integrated behavioral health, and primary care to address recovery services across Rhode Island, including partnering with police departments to embed clinicians in response teams and provide clinical services in the Providence Schools. She has both a nursing degree and a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Rhode Island.

The board is grateful for the enormous contributions Mr. Larivee has brought to CRJ, providing innovative and forward thinking leadership as it grew from a small organization focused on corrections reform to a 750-employee human services provider and public policy workshop.

Mr. Larivee oversaw the 1999 merger of the Crime and Justice Foundation, where he served as executive director, and Massachusetts Half-Way Houses, to create Community Resources for Justice, a unique organization working across the intersection of policy development and direct services.

During his career, Mr. Larivee helped to reshape the criminal justice field, working through the transition from the draconian tough-on-crime era into the emergence of evidence-based, data-driven policy work to focus on reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for individuals. He was instrumental in the creation of the first day reporting center, revolutionizing community supervision with a model now used around the world. He spearheaded the reemergence of reentry services in Massachusetts and the opening of four centers across the state. And he led efforts to reduce over-incarceration of adults, juveniles, and individuals with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Larivee oversaw remarkable growth in the CRJ’s programs and its scope of work. CRJ opened its eighth community-based residential reentry center earlier this year in Buffalo, New York, adding to its programs supporting adults transitioning home after incarceration. The organization also operates 38 group homes for adults with developmental disabilities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. And the Crime and Justice Institute, the direct descendant of the Crime and Justice Foundation where John spent his early career, now uses its data and policy expertise to further reforms in adult and juvenile justice systems nationwide as a division of CRJ.

“As I prepare to leave the organization I’ve had the pleasure of serving for the entirety of my adult life, I look back in awe at how much we’ve accomplished and how many lives we’ve touched through our work,” Mr. Larivee said. “There is still much work to be done, and I have total confidence in CRJ’s staff, the executive leadership, the board, and my successor to carry forward and create a better, brighter future.”

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For more than 140 years, Community Resources for Justice has worked to change lives and building stronger, safer communities. We serve men and women returning from incarceration to the community, support at-risk youth to make positive life decisions, and empower adults with developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible. CRJ maintains a national-scale research and consulting practice, the Crime and Justice Institute, which drives bold, transformative improvements in criminal and juvenile justice systems. More information is available at www.crj.org.