Center for Health & Justice

ILAPSC 2026 breakout session

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BRIDGING THE GAP

How Law Enforcement–Led Deflection Strengthens Problem-Solving Courts

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Speakers



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Session roadmap

01	02	03	04	05
Define the lane	**Ask the court question**	**Show the mechanism**	**Ground it locally**	**Design together**
Deflection, diversion, and treatment courts	Who needs voluntary support, and who needs court structure?	How front-end decisions affect readiness, flow, and capacity	Illinois case example and operational constraints	Practical questions for courts, police, and providers

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Learning objectives

Conceptual understanding	Distinguish deflection from diversion and problem-solving courts; explain why deflection supports rather than replaces courts.
Practical application	Show how law enforcement-led deflection can reduce inappropriate court referrals and improve readiness for those who do enter court.
System collaboration	Identify concrete strategies courts, police, and providers can use to design pathways that close system gaps.

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For Problem Solving Courts:

The central concern is: Does deflection strengthen problem-solving courts or pull people away from them?

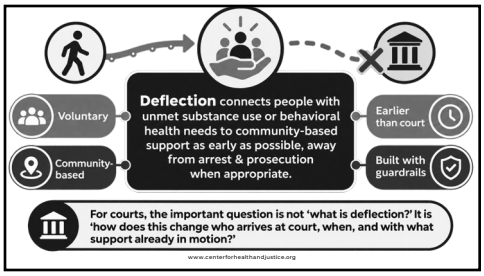
The answer depends on design.

When law enforcement, courts, and service providers share the same pathway logic, deflection becomes a front-end sorting and connection strategy, not a competing program.

Not competition	**Different lanes**
Not softer	**Earlier fit**
Not vague	**Operational design**

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Deflection, diversion, and problem-solving courts

The lanes overlap in purpose, but they do not operate from the same authority.

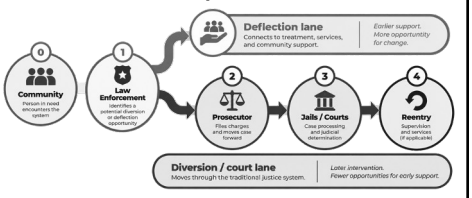
Deflection	Diversion	Problem-Solving Courts
Community-based	**Legal-based**	**Court-based**
May occur without arrest, booking, filing, or court supervision	Typically tied to a charge, prosecutor decision, or court process	Judicial oversight, accountability, treatment expectations, and team-based case planning
Voluntary connection to services	Alternative legal case handling	Structured court intervention

Cleaner lanes create fewer turf wars and better referrals.

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Where the decision point sits



Earlier does not mean less serious. It means better matched.

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The court question: who needs court structure?

Not every person with a behavioral health need needs a court case to access help.

But some people need treatment plus the accountability, incentives, coordination, and judicial structure that a problem-solving court can provide.

Voluntary support may be enough

Court structure may be needed

A bridge back may be needed

Design goal: make the pathway flexible enough to connect people early without blocking access to court when court is the better fit.

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How deflection can improve court readiness



This is how deflection can strengthen, rather than weaken, problem-solving court outcomes.

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Preserving court resources without gatekeeping care

Deflection gives the system another door.

Without aligned deflection	With aligned deflection	Shared benefit
Court may become the service access point because it is the clearest pathway, not because court structure is the best fit.	Some people can access voluntary services upstream while courts remain available for cases that need formal structure.	Courts receive better-matched referrals and avoid becoming the only response to every behavioral health need.

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Three court-facing use cases

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
First contact before charges	**Potential court participant**	**Gap after non-engagement**
Officer encounters a person whose behavior is driven by substance use or mental health needs. Deflection may prevent unnecessary court entry.	A person may need court structure, but early service connection improves stabilization and engagement before formal participation.	A person does not engage in voluntary services. The pathway still preserves a bridge back to legal/court options when appropriate.

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Applied Illinois case example

1. The contact	What did officers repeatedly encounter?
2. The gap	Why was the usual response not solving the underlying problem?
3. The design choice	What did Hamilton PD build or adjust?
4. The guardrails	Policy, exclusions, officer discretion, documentation, liability.
5. The court impact	What changed for referral fit, readiness, or court capacity?

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Operational considerations

What has to be true for the pathway to survive real-world use?



Design test: would this still work during a short-staffed shift, with a newer officer, and an unclear call?

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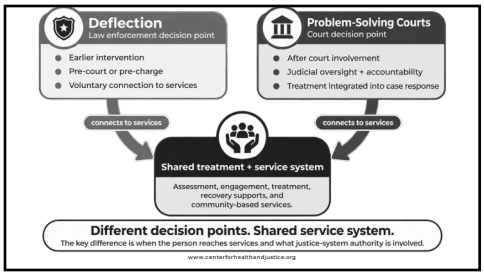
Concrete strategies for joint pathway design

1 Define fit	Agree on who is appropriate for deflection, court, or both.
2 Name the handoff	Know exactly who receives referrals and what response time means.
3 Build feedback	Close the loop so officers and courts know whether the pathway worked.
4 Plan non-engagement	Clarify what happens when someone does not accept or continue services.
5 Review together	Use real cases and pathway data to adjust criteria, training, and operations.

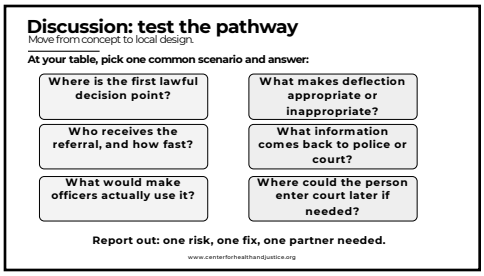
These are the decisions that turn "collaboration" into an actual operating model.

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Deflection
Law enforcement decision point
Earlier intervention
Pre-court or pre-charge
Voluntary connection to services
Problem-Solving Courts
Court decision point
After court involvement
Judicial oversight + accountability
Treatment integrated into case response
connects to services
connects to services
Shared treatment + service system
Assessment, engagement, treatment, recovery supports, and community-based services.
Different decision points. Shared service system.
The key difference is when the person reaches services and what justice-system authority is involved.
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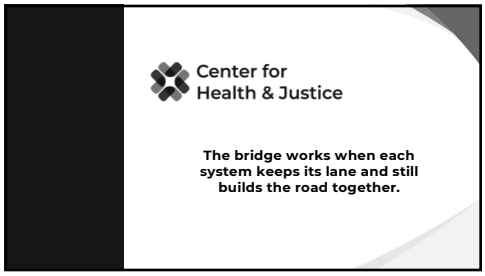
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Discussion: test the pathway
Move from concept to local design.
At your table, pick one common scenario and answer:
Where is the first lawful decision point?
What makes deflection appropriate or inappropriate?
Who receives the referral, and how fast?
What information comes back to police or court?
What would make officers actually use it?
Where could the person enter court later if needed?
Report out: one risk, one fix, one partner needed.
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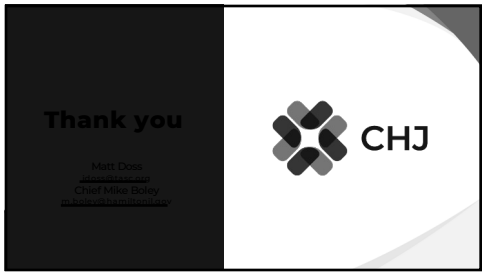
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What participants should leave with
01 Deflection is upstream
It can prevent some people from needing court involvement at all.
02 Courts still matter
They remain critical for people who need structure, accountability, and team-based support.
03 Law enforcement is foundational
Officer trust, discretion, and policy design determine whether the pathway is used.
04 Alignment is the work
Police, courts, and providers need shared expectations, not parallel systems.
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The bridge works when each system keeps its lane and still builds the road together.

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Thank you
Matt Doss
Chief Mike Boley
CHJ

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