FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Major County Sheriffs’ Association and California State Sheriffs’ Association Support
The Stepping Up Initiative

New National Effort Offers Counties Research-Based Support to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in U.S. Jails

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (May 7, 2015)- Leading criminal justice and mental health organizations are joining together in supporting The Stepping Up Initiative, an unprecedented national collaboration designed to generate action in communities across the country toward a common goal: reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in U.S. jails.

Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Sandra Hutchens, who represents the Major County Sheriffs’ Association and the California State Sheriffs’ Association, and other elected officials from throughout the state, held a press conference today on the north steps of the State Capitol to discuss the initiative.

“Major County Sheriffs’ Association and the California State Sheriffs’ Association are proud to be key partners in supporting Stepping Up. Creating an initiative that addresses the critical issue of mental illness in jails supports our mission to end the revolving door of mentally ill individuals coming in and out of our facilities by finding better alternatives for treatment.” said Sheriff Hutchens, Vice-President of the Major County Sheriffs’ Association and Board Member of the California State Sheriffs’ Association.

The Stepping Up Initiative gives counties tools to develop an actionable plan that makes more effective use of budgets, facilitates access to treatment and promotes appropriate alternatives to jail. The initiative offers a variety of support to counties, including expert guidance and exercises on collaborative planning and evidence-based practices.

Stepping Up is being lead through a joint effort of the National Association of Counties (NACO), the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation (APF), with support from the U. S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance.

A National Public Health and Safety Crisis

The number of people with mental illnesses in U.S. jails has reached a crisis level. Approximately 2 million adults with serious diseases such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression are admitted to jails each year, many who also have drug and alcohol use problems. Once incarcerated, they tend to stay longer in jail and are at higher risk of recidivism than individuals without these illnesses.
In addition, jails spend two to three times more on people with mental illnesses than they do on others. The additional time and resources devoted to these individuals do little to reduce re-incarceration or advance recovery.

Leaders in criminal justice and behavioral health agree something must be done on a national scale.

People with mental illnesses, their family members and advocates will play an important role in The Stepping Up Initiative, encouraging partners in government to embrace the call to action.

A series of local events are scheduled to demonstrate support for the initiative and to highlight current efforts to address the high prevalence of mental illness in jails.

For more information on The Stepping Up Initiative, visit www.stepuptogether.org.

###

About Major County Sheriffs’ Association:
The Major County Sheriffs’ Association (MCSA) is a professional law enforcement association of elected sheriffs representing counties or parishes with a population of 500,000 or more. We are dedicated to preserving the highest integrity in law enforcement and the elected Office of the Sheriff. Our membership represents over 100 million Americans.

About California State Sheriffs’ Association:
California State Sheriffs’ Association (CSSA) is a nonprofit professional organization comprised of the 58 sheriffs along with thousands of law-abiding citizens throughout the state. The association was formed in 1894 for the purpose of giving California sheriffs a single effective voice. It was also formed for the purpose of sharing information and providing assistance to sheriffs and departmental personnel, thus enabling them to improve the delivery of law enforcement services to the citizens of this state.