



NEWS RELEASE

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Middlesex Sheriff, UMass Lowell Forge Research Partnership *Agency, University to Collaborate on Study of Inmates to Guide Policy, Programs*

LOWELL, Mass. – Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian and UMass Lowell Chancellor Marty Meehan today signed a memorandum of understanding establishing the first-ever research partnership between the law enforcement agency and university.

Through the partnership, UMass Lowell Prof. James Byrne, a nationally recognized authority on recidivism, inmate behavior and prison culture, will lead a research effort designed to give the Sheriff's Office data and other information to be used in policy formation, performance management and other areas. Students in UMass Lowell's new doctoral program in criminal justice will conduct research with Byrne.

The Middlesex Sheriff's Office is responsible for approximately 1,400 pre-trial detainees and inmates at facilities including the Middlesex House of Correction in Billerica and the Middlesex Jail in Cambridge. The average length of an inmate's stay at the House of Correction is 240 days; the maximum sentence is two-and-a-half years.

Koutoujian, a former prosecutor and state representative, was appointed sheriff in January by Gov. Deval Patrick. Byrne served on Koutoujian's transition team, which was chaired by Carol Higgins O'Brien, a UMass Lowell graduate and assistant superintendent of the Essex County Sheriff's Department. On that team, Byrne led subcommittees that looked at offender re-entry strategies and resources for female offenders.

The “100 Day Report” recently issued by Koutoujian states that his experience in the Legislature showed him the importance of policy that is driven by data like the kind that the new research partnership will deliver.

“This innovative and ambitious new partnership with the University of Massachusetts Lowell will be a vital tool in the fight against crime. The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office will work with the best and brightest from UMass Lowell, revealing best practices, unforeseen efficiencies and the limitless potential of our public safety resources. This performance management will illustrate what works and what doesn’t, so taxpayer dollars are spent effectively and wisely,” Koutoujian said. “All sides will benefit from education, knowledge and see progress on the horizon. I am proud to stand hand-in-hand with UMass Lowell and the Greater Lowell community, working toward academic excellence and increased public safety.”

“I have firmly believed since becoming chancellor that for the university to be truly world-class, it must serve the needs of the larger community,” said Meehan. “Launching innovative partnerships such as the one we are celebrating today creates new opportunities for faculty and students to learn and work in the community while conducting valuable research and stimulating discussion on important issues.”

Byrne is a respected expert on using evidence like research data to create and evaluate programs and policy. On the same day as the signing of the partnership agreement, he was a featured speaker at a Criminal Justice Policy Coalition conference in Boston, “The Road to Rational Justice in Massachusetts.”

The promise of evidence-based research in criminal justice, Byrne said, is that it shows which strategies and programs are working, allowing for better allocation of resources toward those, while discontinuing support for those proven not as effective. With the agreement now in place, the partnership will be able to seek grants to fund research by Byrne and the doctoral students.

UMass Lowell, with a national reputation in science, engineering and technology, is committed to educating students for lifelong success in a diverse world and conducting research and outreach activities that sustain the economic, environmental and social health of the region. The university offers its 14,000 students more than 120 degree choices, internships, five-year combined bachelor’s to master’s programs and doctoral studies in the colleges of Arts, Sciences, Engineering and Management, the School of Health and Environment, and the Graduate School of Education.
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