



# DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff Scott Mittelstadt Chief Deputy

## Mental Health: A Troubling Trend

My thoughts and prayers go out to those who tragically lost their lives at the Molson-Coors Brewery this past week. It will take time for the healing process to begin and for family, friends and co-workers to return to a somewhat normal life. Also, we are all wondering that one question, why?

As we ponder that question, it is my sincere hope that people will finally seriously look at one of the most impactful social issues facing our communities. That social issue being mental health. It is also my hope that politicians do not attempt to politicize this tragedy by using it to move forward their personal agendas. That would truly be distasteful and disrespectful to those who have lost their lives.

Mental health in our communities has reached the point of becoming an epidemic. Law enforcement deals with mental health issues daily with no end in sight. Wisconsin gives our local governments the responsibility to take action to protect individuals when they are a threat to harm themselves or others. The process by which we address this is called an emergency detention. The problem, however, is that there are so many emergency detentions and a finite amount of resources to help. Those who need help receive minimal treatment during an initial 72-hour period as the resources available are overwhelmed by the constant influx of patients being processed into the system. Many times, they are given a safety plan and sent right back to the unhealthy environment they came from.

Those who work in the field of mental health do a fantastic job with the resources they have. The problem is there are only so many mental health workers and treatment facilities and more and more individuals everyday who seem to need the assistance. What is worse is that on top of the typical mental health disorders that these caseworkers see everyday, they are now seeing increasing amounts of individuals with substance abuse related mental health disorders.

Everyday law enforcement respond to assist with attempted suicides, welfare checks, domestic incidents and others that many times are directly linked to mental health. While I am not able speak about the mental health of the actor in Milwaukee, I can tell you that had the plot been foiled, mental health would have been evaluated as he was a threat to himself and others.

There is no easy fix to this problem, but it is an issue that our country needs to get serious about. Too many people are suffering from mental illness and until we get serious about it, self-harm, violence and homicides will continue across our country.

In my opinion, this problem often goes back to basic family values, the environment people live in and the educational environment in which they are brought up. It is so important for parents to closely monitor their children's behavior, the activities they participate in and the people they interact with. It also includes praising and disciplining them when appropriate. Finally, it means working with teachers to monitor the behavior of our children, working together as a team to ensure a healthy environment for children to develop mentally and emotionally.

Remember, the legislature and government do not have the time, talents or resources to fix every social issue that is out there and politics plays absolutely no role in mental health. It starts in our own homes and schools. It is my hope that if we all do a little better at looking out for those around us and providing stable, supportive and disciplined environments for our loved ones, we can ensure Dodge County remains a safe and enjoyable place to live, work and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt