

# Trauma-Informed Practice Strategy Lab: Blueprint Executive Summary

The Center for Justice Innovation (the Center), with funding from the State Justice Institute (SJI), is leading the development of the Trauma-Informed Practice Strategy Lab for Criminal Courts (TIPS Lab). The TIPS Lab aims to bridge the gap between training and implementation of trauma-informed practices, specifically to support criminal court practitioners who receive less support than their counterparts in specialty courts (i.e., community court, drug treatment court, juvenile court). The TIPS Lab has developed a comprehensive Blueprint to address the urgent need for trauma-informed practices within the criminal court system. Recent statistics reveal that the prevalence of trauma among defendants is alarmingly high, estimated at twice the rate of the general population.

The TIPS Lab Blueprint encompasses practical recommendations for criminal courts, utilizing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) *Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*, along with principles of procedural justice. This Blueprint is designed for criminal court practitioners nationwide, including those in small, medium, and large jurisdictions. It is designed for a range of roles, including judicial officers, attorneys, security person-

nel, court administrators, victim service advocates, pre-trial services officers, case managers, and community members. The purpose of the Blueprint is to assist these individuals in learning and applying trauma-informed practices within their roles in the criminal court system. Recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of the criminal court system, practitioners are encouraged to convene and collaborate with colleagues to discuss and implement the recommendations outlined in the Blueprint.

The Blueprint lays out the first steps for practitioners to take when embarking on a change process. This includes promoting leadership buy-in and conducting an assessment that addresses disparities and areas for improvement within court settings. The Blueprint is designed around four domains: Trauma Training, Trauma-Informed Guidance for Criminal Court, Trauma-Informed Court Spaces, and Burnout, Vicarious Trauma, and Moral Injury.

The Blueprint provides trauma-informed recommendations for each step of case processing beginning at pre-court arrest or ticketing and continuing through sentencing. Targeted recommendations are provided for court actors in each step of case processing. These recommendations promote understanding, respect, and voice for defendants, victims, witnesses, jurors, and other court users.

Practitioners receive guidance on developing a trauma education plan. This serves as a customized roadmap that outlines relevant topics for court staff and sequences educational offerings to best support the implementation of knowledge into daily practice.

Practitioners are offered trauma-informed strategies to enhance courtrooms and courthouses environments. These recommendations consider how the physical environment—such as lighting, technology, and signage—can help alleviate trauma symptoms that people often experience in a courthouse. These suggested practices include both free and low-cost initiatives, as well as multi-year projects.

The Blueprint also offers tools and strategies to help court practitioners understand the impact of trauma on their lives and provides recommendations for burnout prevention. It includes definitions of burnout along with reflection questions to help practitioners explore the intersection of burnout, vicarious trauma, and moral injury in their work. This domain focuses on staff emotional well-being, how trauma can impact health, and offers implementable systems to promote self and team care.

This Blueprint serves as a vital resource for criminal court practitioners, providing the tools and strategies needed to implement trauma-informed practices that acknowledge and address the complex dynamics of trauma in the legal system. By embracing this approach, courts can enhance their effectiveness and create a supportive environment fostering healing and justice.

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#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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