

Summary of Mental Health Court

The Jackson County Mental Health Court (pilot program) has been established in an attempt to reduce recidivism by providing mentally ill defendants with a hands-on approach to punishment/rehabilitation. An ancillary benefit to this program is a reduction in out of pocket medical expenses by minimizing inpatient hospital treatment that these ill defendants might otherwise incur.

The Mental Health Court is cross-jurisdictional. In other words, the presiding Judge serves as both a District and Circuit Court Judge as the defendants who qualify for the program can either have misdemeanors or felonies, which do not expose the defendant to incarceration for more than five years. Other requirements for the Mental Health Court include but are not limited to the following:

- a) Must be county resident.
- b) Mental illness must be a component of the crime for which the individual is charged.
- c) Individual must have preexisting mental illness diagnosis.

If an individual is desirous of entering this voluntary program, an application must be completed. If the individual meets the base requirements of the program, a formal mental assessment is conducted. After the mental health assessment report is generated, a Treatment Team meets biweekly to accept/ reject potential candidates. The Treatment Team includes the Judge, Prosecuting Attorney, representative Defense Attorney, Allegiance Hospital representative, two Lifeway's representatives, City Police representative and a Social Worker.

If the defendant is accepted by the Treatment Team, his/ her case must be disposed of on the basis of a guilty plea. There is no guarantee that the charges to which the guilty plea is entered will be dismissed at a later date based on successful completion of the Mental Health Program. However, the "carrot" is the avoidance of jail time. Generally speaking, individuals who are accepted into the Mental Health Court Program will not receive jail. If up front jail is required, the individual is allowed to opt out of the program, and return to his/ her originating Court.

Once sentenced, the individual will have periodic sessions in Court with the Judge and Treatment Team. Initially, those visits will be every two weeks. Other mandatory aspects of probation (which generally will last twelve months) will include treatment/ medication compliance and other such requirements as deemed necessary by the Court to maintain the individual's stability.

The ultimate goal of the Mental Health Court system is to integrate these citizens back into the community and reduce the potential for repeat criminality.