

Background

The large number of offenders with serious and chronic mental illnesses entering the criminal justice system each year creates a growing social problem affecting both the criminal justice system and the public mental health system. These offenders often spend unnecessary time in jail, and, without access to mental health services upon release, tend to be re-arrested and cycle through the system over and over again. While incarcerated, mentally ill offenders are at risk of worsening psychiatric symptoms resulting in increased vulnerability and/or increased agitation impacting the stability and safety of the general jail population. The needs of the community are not addressed, the costs to the taxpayer escalate, and the defendant continues to have the same problems and associated risks as before.

The Mental Health Court partner agencies recognize the need to positively impact this alarming trend. We are determined to focus resources, training and expertise on the unique needs of these individuals. Most importantly, every effort is made to encourage the involvement of the individual in all aspects of the process.

Participants are offered a treatment-based sentencing alternative, which utilizes judicial oversight as a component of the program. A comprehensive approach is taken in order to provide an array of services designed to address the many needs of this population.

Our Purpose

This Court works to direct eligible offenders with serious mental illness away from incarceration and into appropriate community treatment. The Mental Health Court has four broad purposes:

- To preserve the public safety.
- To reduce inappropriate incarceration of mentally ill offenders and promote their safety and well being.
- To reduce repeated criminal activity by offenders with mental illness (legal recidivism).
- To reduce length and frequency of hospitalization of mentally ill offenders (clinical recidivism).

Who Is Eligible?

- Baltimore City resident
- Diagnosed with a serious mental illness and/or trauma-related disorder
- Eligible for public mental health services
- Agrees to comply with program requirements
- Charged with a misdemeanor or a felony within the jurisdiction of the District Court
- Has never been convicted of a crime of violence
- Is not charged with a domestic violence crime.

Participation is voluntary and is subject to review by the Forensic Alternative Services Team (FAST). Once accepted into the Court, the defendant is assisted in developing an appropriate community-based treatment plan that addresses his/her specific behavioral and mental health needs. The treatment plan is presented to the Court for approval. If approved, the treatment recommendations are court-ordered as conditions of pretrial release or probation.

Outcomes

The defendant, their case manager, the Court Coordinator, and the supervising agent then attend review hearings to report on progress. If noncompliance occurs, the Court may adjust the plan to motivate adherence, employ non-jail based-sanctions or order incarceration. Participants who are successful in complying with their treatment plan may be eligible for a nol pros, stet, probation before judgment, probation in lieu of incarceration, or early termination of probation.



Mental Health Court
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