



MEDIA RELEASE

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Knox County Mental Health Court Advisory Board to Hold First Meeting

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— The Knox County Mental Health Court Advisory Board will meet for the first time this Thursday to begin ironing out an operations timeline that will establish a court for adult defendants who have serious and persistent mental illnesses.

The meeting will be held in the Small Assembly Room of the City/County Building at 3 p.m. on Aug. 17.

The court is designed to provide individualized treatment as an alternative to incarceration and strengthen the justice system's ability to identify, assess, and monitor the participants. It will also improve public safety by ensuring that participants receive high quality, community-based services.

Similar courts were established across the country beginning in the 1990s and there are about 300 of them. The concept, however, is fairly new in Tennessee, which has only seven such mental health courts. Knox County would become the eighth – something Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs and Knox County Criminal Court Clerk Mike Hammond are proud to have begun working on more than a year ago.

“Mental health is a strong contributor to the cycle of incarceration in Knox County, and across the country,” said Mayor Jacobs. “I’m glad we are working to become one of the state’s early adopters of helping and/or treating the individual rather than perpetuating that cycle, which is expensive, ineffective, and doesn’t address the underlying problem.”

The goals of the Knox County Mental Health Court include improving the quality of life for participants; reducing incarceration and recidivism; reducing correction costs; improving public health and safety; and increasing treatment accountability and success.

“Mental illness, like physical illnesses, can affect anyone regardless of education, income, or zip code,” said Hammond, who also chairs the 6-member committee. “If someone comes to court with a broken arm, we do what we can to get them bandaged up. The same should be true if they’re in need of treatment for a mental health issue. Research shows that showing this kind of care and compassion is more likely to keep people out of the justice system.”

The advisory board includes Criminal Court Clerk Mike Hammond, Attorney General Charme Allen, Criminal Court Judge Steven Sword, Criminal Sessions Judge Chuck Cerny, Public Defender Eric Lutton, and local attorney Jonathan Cooper.

The group plans to meet again Thursday, Nov. 16 at 3 p.m. in the same location.

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