

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY FLORIDA**

**HOPE, HEALING, HELP:  
17th JUDICIAL CIRCUIT MENTAL HEALTH DIVERSION PROJECT**

**I. BACKGROUND**

Mental health illness is one of the most prevalent issues our county, state, and nation currently faces.<sup>1</sup> Florida law authorizes each county to fund a mental health program under which a defendant in the justice system assessed with a mental health condition or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder is to be processed in such a manner as to appropriately address the severity of the identified mental illness through treatment services tailored to the individual needs of the individual. The Seventeenth Judicial Circuit has recognized and responded to the problems faced by people experiencing mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system by establishing and continuing to operate mental health courts in both the circuit (felony) and county (misdemeanor) court criminal divisions.

In addition, Broward County joined a nationwide effort to reduce the over-representation of individuals in jails living with mental illnesses by embracing the Stepping Up Initiative through the passage by the Board of County Commissioners of County Resolution No. 2015-269 on May 19, 2015. The Stepping Up Initiative, sponsored by the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Foundation, encourages public, private, and nonprofit partners to embrace innovative ideas and programs to reduce the number of people in jails living with mental illnesses. By answering the call to action, Broward County joined countless counties in recognizing that without appropriate treatment and services, people experiencing mental illnesses continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families.

In 2021, the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit and its various justice system partners participated in a two-day Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM) workshop to (1) develop a picture of how people living with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders engage with the criminal justice system along six distinct intercept points, (2) identify resources and gaps in resources, and (3) develop priorities for change and strategic action plans. The SIM workshop reinforced the commitment the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit and its stakeholders have in adequately addressing the myriad of issues presented by those in the criminal justice system who are experiencing mental illnesses or co-occurring mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness. National Institution of Mental Health, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness> (last visited Aug. 18, 2021)

## **II. VISION**

The cooperative vision amongst all signatories to this agreement is to divert eligible individuals experiencing severe and persistent mental illnesses or co-occurring severe mental illnesses and substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system and into comprehensive community-based treatment and support services, while at the same time protecting public safety. This is accomplished by forging productive relationships among all stakeholders who have an interest in the welfare and safety of those in our community, including those living with mental health conditions, and by pursuing innovations in the manner in which treatment and support services are offered and administered.

## **III. MISSION**

The mission of this agreement is to minimize preventable and unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illnesses and possible co-occurring substance use disorders, at the time of arrest, booking, or post-booking. This is accomplished by ensuring the availability to crisis intervention training (CIT) by law enforcement agencies and its officers, utilizing mental health and substance misuse centralized receiving facilities located throughout Broward County, and supporting recovery and community integration by fostering access to necessary treatment and supportive services throughout Broward County.

## **IV. GOAL**

The goal of this agreement is to engage stakeholders to participate in strategies that aim to divert individuals experiencing severe and persistent mental illnesses or co-occurring severe mental illnesses and substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system and jails, and into comprehensive community-based integrated health and psychiatric treatment, housing, and support services. This will be achieved by:

1. All law enforcement agencies and its officers participating in CIT training, including any refresher training as needed;
2. Promoting the provision of and access to treatment services, including the utilization of centralized receiving centers located throughout Broward County, which are designed to provide individuals experiencing a crisis a convenient point of entry into the mental health and substance use systems for immediate assessment as well as subsequent referral and linkage to appropriate and available providers and services;
3. Coordination among all stakeholders to facilitate post-booking assessments that identify in-custody offenders who are experiencing mental health illnesses for the purposes of recommending and linking such individuals to appropriate treatment services;
4. Promoting communication and the exchange of information among all criminal justice partners; and
5. Working cooperatively toward the establishment and swift implementation of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida's Mental Health Diversion program.

## **V. RESPONSIBILITIES**

The signatories to this agreement agree to support the mission and goals of this agreement.

1. This agreement is intended to ensure mental health recovery and community integration by promoting pre-booking and post-booking intervention strategies for the diversion of qualified individuals experiencing severe and persistent mental illnesses or co-occurring mental illnesses and substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system and linkage to appropriate treatment and support services.
2. The signatories agree to work in collaboration to support and strengthen the mission, goals, and responsibilities of this agreement.

The signatories agree that the below mentioned practices will occur to promote this cooperative cause:

1. All law enforcement agencies within Broward County will participate in CIT training and assign a representative to attend any meetings offered by the Crisis Intervention Team;
2. Each law enforcement agency is urged to collect data on CIT calls and outcomes, and share such information with its justice system partners;
3. All law enforcement agencies within Broward County will utilize the various centralized receiving centers offered by the Florida Department of Children & Families, Broward Behavioral Health Coalition, and Henderson Behavioral Health for qualified individuals in crisis as a result of a severe mental health condition or co-occurring severe mental illness and substance use disorder;
4. All stakeholders will work cooperatively to identify individuals experiencing mental illnesses and possible co-occurring substance use disorders who meet the criteria for diversion at the earliest possible stage, including at the time of arrest, booking, or post-booking;
5. Broward Behavioral Health Coalition, through the Fellowship House, agrees to coordinate with the Circuit's mental health diversion program and all interested stakeholders to facilitate post-booking assessments that identify in-custody offenders who are experiencing mental health illnesses for the purposes of recommending and linking appropriate treatment and support services;
6. Stakeholders will convene quarterly meetings to promote communication and information sharing to further the goals and mission of the mental health diversion program and this agreement;
7. Behavioral health providers will offer evidence-based practices and trauma-informed practices to best serve the population of focus, promote recovery, foster reentry into the community, and decrease recidivism;
8. Behavioral health providers will submit written progress reports to the court in order to best inform decision making regarding criminal justice dispositions;
9. Each stakeholder organization will agree to identify a point of contact to actively assist in the resolution of barriers that may occur as a result of cross-system collaboration and keep such information up to date should point of contact change over time; and
10. Stakeholders will share an individual's confidential health information with each other in compliance with all applicable laws.

## Signatures

---

Jack Tuter, Chief Judge, Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

---

Kathleen R. Pugh, Esq., Trial Court Administrator, 17th Judicial Circuit

---

Steve Geller, Mayor, Broward County

---

Harold F. Pryor, State Attorney, 17th Judicial Circuit

---

Gordon Weekes, Public Defender, 17th Judicial Circuit

---

Gregory Tony, Sheriff, Broward Sheriff's Office

---

Anthony W. Rosa, President, Broward County Chiefs of Police Association

---

Silvia Quintana, CEO, Broward Behavioral Health Coalition

---

Sandra Cumper, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Broward County