



**NEWS ADVISORY
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Seattle Municipal Court Documents Success With Mental Health Court

Newly released evaluation report describes the benefits that Mental Health Court provides for its participants and the community.

Sixty-two percent of Seattle Mental Health Court participants successfully completed program requirements according to a newly released evaluation report. Most importantly, these defendants experienced a significant decline in the number of criminal charges filed for two years after exiting the program, when compared to the two years prior to entry.

“This program has been a success on many levels,” said Presiding Judge C. Kimi Kondo, currently assigned to the Mental Health Court. *“Chronically mentally ill offenders are offered treatment and assistance with housing. Over the past 14 years, the Court has worked as a team with treatment and housing providers, social workers, defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys and our dedicated probation staff. Our goal is to reduce criminal activity related to a diagnosed mental illness.”*

Participants volunteer to ‘opt in’ to the program or can choose to be monitored by Mental Health Court post sentencing. The average program duration is about two years, with regular court reviews and appointments with assigned probation counselors. The small percentages of dangerous offenders are scheduled for more frequent contact by the Court.

Only 24% of ‘opt in’ clients who successfully completed the program had one or more jail bookings during the two year period post-program, compared to 95% of non-completers. Significantly, the mental health court completers spent 211 fewer days in jail during the two years after their exit from the program compared to the number of days these same defendants spent in jail two years before entry into the program.

Those not opting into the program but monitored post-sentencing spent 1,804 fewer days in jail in the two years after supervision. The result is significant. Cost savings to the City for these time periods is upwards of \$210,000 according to the report authored by Law & Policy Associates.

“This is a sensible, compassionate and fiscally responsible approach to addressing the many problems faced by our mentally ill population. Assisting people to become stable in their

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THE MUNICIPAL COURT OF SEATTLE



personal lives ultimately benefits everyone in the City by making the community safer,” says Judge Kondo.

Even for those participants who did not complete the program, there was an increase in the utilization of mental health services. This suggests that even those who did not successfully complete the program attained a higher degree of organization in their daily lives.

Additionally, both program completers and non-completers had lower rates of jail days after mental health court supervision. Clearly, participation in the Mental Health Court has a positive impact on behavior and defendant equilibrium regardless of completion rates.

The full evaluation is available on the Seattle Municipal Court website:

<http://www.seattle.gov/courts/comjust/mh.htm>

A direct link to the full report is here:

<http://www.seattle.gov/courts/pdf/MHReport2013.pdf>