



MEDIA RELEASE

OFFICE OF COUNTY MAYOR GLENN JACOBS

400 Main Street, Suite 615, Knoxville, TN 37902

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Contact: Mike Donila Abbey Harris
306-1177 cell 215-4579 office
705-1681 cell

Knox County Leaders to Unveil Details About Mental Health Court

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.— Members of the Mental Health Advisory Committee, appointed by Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs, on Tuesday will unveil details about the new mental health court, which is designed to help adult defendants with serious and persistent mental illnesses.

The public presentation will take place before the Knox County Commission at noon in the Main Assembly Room of the City/County Building (400 Main Street SW).

“At times, it can be incredibly difficult to navigate the judicial system,” said Criminal Court Clerk Hammond, who is also the chairman of the Mental Health Advisory Committee. “The goal of the mental health court is to figure out the root cause of a person’s arrest—sometimes repeated arrests—and get them the help they need, rather than throwing them in jail and perpetuating the cycle of incarceration.”

Mental Health Courts are specialized court dockets that utilize a problem-solving model as opposed to the traditional criminal court processing. These courts are designed to serve as an alternative to incarceration by addressing the underlying issues that led to an individual’s arrest through judicially supervised treatment plans developed by a team of court staff and mental health professionals.

They also help improve the quality of life for participants; reduce incarceration and recidivism; reduce correction costs; improve public health and safety; and increase treatment accountability and success.

Similar courts were established across the country beginning in the 1990s and there are about 300 of them. The concept, however, is relatively new to Tennessee, which has only seven such mental health courts. Knox County would become the eighth – something Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs and Hammond began working on roughly a year ago.

Mayor Jacobs first appointed an exploratory committee to address feasibility. The county also applied for and received state funding to cover the costs of the operation.

“The mental health epidemic is impacting Knox County in myriad ways,” said Mayor Jacobs. “Doing the same thing we’ve always done isn’t working; it’s time to innovate – and that’s what we’re doing. I’m excited to see the impact this court has on those who need it.”

During the overview, members of the Mental Health Advisory Committee will discuss the timeline for getting the court up and running and who will be eligible to participate. They also will talk more about how the court will operate and the benefits officials hope it will have on the community.

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