

California Courts News Transcript

Title: Mental Health Task Force Reports Progress

Date: November 18, 2010

Collaborative mental health courts like this one in San Francisco focus on treatment - to restore health and reduce criminal activity. There are only about 40 of these courts in all of California. Yet the need is greater, and there are fewer resources than ever before.

Hon. Brad Hill, Court of Appeal, 5th Appellate District *"At the county level we don't have enough evaluators, we don't have enough psychologists, we don't have enough mental health facilities, and so it delays the courts, delays the court proceedings, and that impacts every courthouse here."*

So the Chief Justice convened an inter-agency grant supported task force. The goal: to explore ways to improve procedures – so justice could be served, and folks with mental health issues could get treatment. After 3 years of study, the task force published a draft report with 135 recommendations. Then came public hearings in Sacramento and Los Angeles.

Hon. Brad Hill, Court of Appeal, 5th Appellate District *"We're here to take all of your opinions in, listen to you, and then we will be getting back together, all of us as a task force, and discussing those opinions that have been presented."*

One speaker advocated for the many veterans who find themselves in court.

Christopher Colbert, Calif. Dept. of Veterans Affairs *"How do we identify them and how do we link them to the mental health services that they truly need?"*

Speakers also noted the high recidivism rate in mental health cases. Zack Olmstead said the economical solution is to provide permanent supportive housing. Here, too, effective networking is required.

Zack Olmstead, Housing California *"If we can connect you know those people on the ground whether they be parole or probation officers with these providers and make those linkages, I think we'll have some pretty successful results."*

But in some counties, affordable supportive housing is hard to come by.

Hon. Suzanne Kingsbury, El Dorado Superior Court Presiding Judge *"I know that we had that component in our mental health court but unfortunately that went away as the budget went in the tank."*

Treatment is equally scarce.

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Professor Dave Meyer, USC Institute of Psychiatry, Law, Behavioral Sciences *“If you want treatment locally, and you want it to happen quickly, then you’ve got to have the facilities and that’s a resources issue. There just isn’t enough treatment resource to deal with this problem.”*

A representative from the Forensic Mental Health Association brought positive feedback.

Dr. Mark Grabau, Forensic Mental Health Association *“We’re very pleased and impressed by the report, not only in its scope but in its detailed recommendations.”*

The chair of the task force says the recommendations are practical, and economical.

Hon. Brad Hill, Court of Appeal, 5th Appellate District *“Our primary recommendations don’t cost anything at all.”*

For instance, they suggest that jails should not release people in the middle of the night, when pharmacies are closed and support services are unavailable. Another recommendation: jails and prisons should coordinate to use identical drug formularies for continuity of care.

Hon. Brad Hill, Court of Appeal, 5th Appellate District *“Some small changes that can save a lot of money and make a lot of sense. We just need to get people to talk to one another, figuring out what we can do for less money, and basically seeing what we can do to make the mental health system in the courts work for the people.”*

After considering all the comments, the task force will present final recommendations to the Judicial Council in the spring of 2011. You can read the entire report on the court’s website.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting from Sacramento for California Courts News.

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