

June 22, 2011

Reply to:
Richard Stephens
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Honorable John E. Dailey
Commission Chairman
Leon County Board of County Commissioners
301 S. Monroe Street, 5th Floor
Tallahassee, FL. 32301

Dear Chairman Dailey:

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness. We are writing as the executive board of NAMI Tallahassee to voice support for the Leon County Mental Health Court. We ask that you consider the following points as you prepare the budget for the 2011/2012 fiscal year:

Mental Health Court in Leon County operates as a highly coordinated effort managed by the Court Mental Health Coordinator. The three positions described below along with a robust community competency restoration function are critical to the continued success of this specialized court.

- The Mental Health Court Case Manager (currently grant funded) has special training to assist with case management of all cases appearing on Mental Health Court dockets.
- The Pre-Trial Release Specialist (grant funded) assigned to the County Probation office has special training to manage individuals with severe mental illnesses. Mental Health pre-trial release is substantively different from traditional, compliance driven, case management in that there is a strong rehabilitative component – reminders of court ordered appointments, assistance with transportation, arrangements for vocational rehabilitation and other services as appropriate.
- The Mental Health Court Transition Case Manager (grant funded) develops and implements re-entry plans for mentally ill defendants on release from jail or the Florida Department of Corrections. Plans include considerations of housing, health care including mental health care, job training, job placement and other details

The Court Mental Health Coordinator, the case managers described above, a team of competency restoration specialists, attorneys and other mental health professionals meet on a regular basis in order to provide staff support for the Mental Health Court judges. Without such support judges have difficulty making informed decisions about a case - especially about appropriateness of pre-trial release.

Mentally ill inmates are among the most expensive. In addition to the ordinary costs of meals, laundry and other supplies and services, mentally ill inmates often require close confinement, and almost always need additional medical attention including expensive psychotropic medications.

Outputs of the Mental Health Court in Leon County are impressive. The court has served 1607 defendants in the misdemeanor division and another 1120 in the felony division representing a total of 3674 cases disposed since the inception of Mental Health Court in May, 2008. The Pre-Trial Release Specialist carried a caseload of between 35 and 38 cases during the first 5 months of the 2010/2011 fiscal year. The Community Competency Restoration Program served a total of 122 defendants between May, 2008 and December, 2010.

Outcomes attributable to the Mental Health Court are nothing short of remarkable. The average time to case disposition for mentally ill defendants in 2007 was 133 days for misdemeanors and 187 days for felonies. The average time to case disposition in Mental Health Court is 70 days for misdemeanors and 99 days for felonies. Defendants successfully remaining on pre-trial release during just the five month period from October 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011 represent jail diversion of 4101 days. Defendants receiving competency restoration services creates jail diversion of just over 30,000 days. In total, jail diversion alone, using the lowest figure obtained from the Leon County Sheriffs Office of \$54 per day, jail diversion alone results in a real dollar saving of \$1,841,454 over a 31 month period from May 2008 through December 30, 2010. The expenditure for medications in the Leon County jail was \$104,434 during fiscal year 2008/2009. Medication costs for FY 2009/2010 were \$55,101 for approximately the same inmate daily census. While the difference of \$49,333 cannot be directly attributed to Mental Health Court, diversion of mentally ill defendants could certainly account for a large portion of the saving.

Mental Health Court in Leon County can be sustained in its current configuration by funding the three positions that are currently funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Reinvestment grant at \$142,651 per year, contractual services for community competency restoration at \$85,000, and a small contingency fund budgeted at \$7,500. This is a total expenditure of \$235,151 for fiscal year 2011/2012.

If estimates by County staff and the Sheriff's Department are accurate, then real dollar net savings afforded by jail diversion alone will be \$1,606,303 for FY 2011/2012.

NAMI Tallahassee supports the continuation of Mental Health Court in Leon County in its present configuration.

Finally we ask that you consider the people who live with a mental illness each and every day. Some of them are the least advantaged citizens of Leon County, and as such, deserve patience, respect, our understanding and occasionally some resources.

Respectfully,

RoseAnn Scheck
President-elect

Copies to: Mr. Parwez Alam, County Administrator
Mr. Grant Slayden, Trial Court Administrator
Mr. Rick Minor Chief of Staff to Mayor John Marks
Chief Dennis Jones, Tallahassee Police Department