

Creating a Lifesaving Mental Health Court

Speakers

Kristi Taylor



Kristi Taylor is the Executive Director of the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH). She has over 25 years of experience as an attorney and policymaker. After receiving a BBA with Honors in Finance from the McCombs School of Business and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Texas School of Law, Taylor represented children and parents in the child welfare system for seven years.

In 2006, Taylor was selected by the Supreme Court of Texas to create the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families. She later served as a Staff Attorney and Assistant Director of the Children's Commission. In 2017, Ms. Taylor spearheaded the planning for a new judicial commission on mental health and was named the Executive Director in 2018.

Molly Davis



Molly Davis joined the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health in 2020 and is the lead author of the Juvenile Mental Health and IDD Bench Book. Prior to that, she served as a prosecutor in Tarrant County for 12 years, including 6 years as a juvenile prosecutor. She is Board Certified in Juvenile Law and has trained judges, lawyers, probation officers, CPS workers, and law enforcement officers on juvenile law and procedures. Molly holds a bachelor of Social Work from Michigan State University and a JD from the University of Dayton School of Law.

Hon. Brent Carr



Judge Brent Carr became the presiding judge of Tarrant County Criminal Court 9 in 1991. He joined the JCMH Executive Committee as a Jurist-in-Residence in 2023. To fulfill a need to appropriately resolve cases involving mentally ill defendants, he established the Tarrant County Mental Health Court in 2003. He subsequently established the Tarrant County Veterans Treatment Court in 2010 and the Tarrant County RISE program for sex-trafficked female felony offenders in 2011. These programs have produced well over 1,000 graduates and significantly enhanced the lives of the participants.

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Summary



Mental Health Courts (MHCs) provide a more compassionate and effective way of addressing mental health needs, and in doing so, they help to reduce crime, improve public safety, and promote the welfare of individuals and communities. People with mental illness and intellectual and developmental disabilities cycle repeatedly through the courts but often lack the tools to address their needs or access adequate treatment. Judges can use MHC programs to connect people with appropriate treatment, community resources, and ongoing judicial monitoring to address these issues.

MHC programs can be used in various court settings, including criminal, civil, and family law. They can also have varying goals, target participants, program conditions, and treatment options, and can address mental health challenges in criminal courts either pre- or post- adjudication.

Objectives

- Understand what a mental health court is
- Learn the process of establishing a mental health court
- Learn the benefits of mental health court for individuals with mental illness and the communities they live in

