



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Board Approves Funding for Mental Health Court

GRAND RAPIDS – This morning the Kent County Board of Commissioners accepted a \$193,000 grant to institute a Mental Health Court in the County. This specialized court docket was created for certain defendants with mental illness, an approach that substitutes a problem-solving model for traditional criminal court processing. The grant comes after spending the past several months completing a planning study, which was funded by a grant from the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) in March of 2017.

Staff from 17th Circuit Court, Circuit Court Judge Joseph Rossi, Network180, the Sheriff's Office, Prosecutor's Office, Michigan Department of Corrections and the Public Defender's Office reviewed the potential of a mental health court for the County and developed the policies, procedures and an implementation strategy. Earlier this month, the SCAO awarded \$193,410 for implementation of a mental health court within the County. Grant dollars will be used for program coordination, clinical support, incentives, data entry, program involvement, drug tests and legal defense.

The goals of the program include a reduction in recidivism for defendants, and a corresponding reduction in jail bed days. When fully operational, the court will have a caseload of 45 clients. It is anticipated that most, if not all, clients in the mental health court will be managed in the community while being engaged in treatment. The Kent County mental health court will focus on serving individuals who have a severe mental illness and are charged with a felony. "Mental health issues are perhaps one of the largest contributing factors to recidivism," said Judge Rossi. "Merely putting offenders suffering from mental illness in jail will not resolve the problem. Providing much-needed treatment could help people recover and stay out of the justice system, while alleviating the strain on the courts and jails."

The State Legislature created the mental health court statute in 2013, enabling trial courts in Michigan to develop and operate mental health courts. The SCAO makes funds available for planning and implementation of mental health courts. "Approximately 10 % of our jail population is severely mentally ill; that is more than 100 people on any given day," according to Kent County Undersheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young. "Although in some cases jail will still be necessary, our hopes are that the right treatment at the right time in these cases can allow residents to remain in the community in a safe manner."

"Treatment is a much more cost-effective way to deal with mental health issues, and it is also a more holistic course of action," said Scott Gilman, Executive Director of Network180. "I believe we can positively impact lives through this specialized docket." The grant runs through September 30, 2018. It is expected that the grant will be renewable.

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