

DISTRICT/MUNICIPAL COURT LIASON COMMITTEE

The District/municipal Court liaison committee met for the first time after the summer break on September 28, 2017.

The Director of the Center for Dialog and Resolution, Maralise Quan Hood informed the committee about the new pilot project wherein Small Claims Mediations which have been occurring at the County-City Building will be held at the Dialog and Resolution Center, 717 Tacoma Ave. Tacoma, WA 98402. Maralise was pleased to inform the committee that the center has expanded their assistance to the Court, center staff will be used as staff mediators for parenting plan mediations. Maralise announced that the united way was a partnering organization for mediation services.

The Center's Annual Friend and Fundraising Breakfast was a fantastic success and donations can still be made on the center's website, www.CenterForResolution.org.

The committee received exciting news from the Pierce County District Court. The Honorable District Court Judge Judy Jasprica informed the committee of the creation of the Probation Resource Center within the Probation Department. Grant funds have been utilized in the past for restoration services. It is hoped that grant funds received going forward may also be used for services that go well beyond just restoration. Current plans are looking at two additional case coordinators in a partnership program with greater lakes mental health to provide a resource center that can coordinate needs with resources for qualified defendants in the areas of financial stability; veterans' affairs; GED and educational opportunities and housing assistance.

The Resource Center is starting a clothing bank, apply named "Just Treads". They are accepting donations right now for adults. Donations gladly accepted at the 2nd floor counter, clean clothes only please.

Pierce County District Court is contemplating moving their Probation department from the Hess building on the corner of 9th and Tacoma avenue to the 6th floor of the County-City Building. Pierce County District Court Administrator Charles Ramey spoke of plans being considered to reconfigure courtrooms on the 1st floor as they are not jury compatible. The plans would be to make two of the courtrooms jury capable and create one civil department with the idea that all civil cases would go through that department. The District Court is discussing the possibility of fine tuning the distribution system in the Criminal Department to a top down system wherein the case would stay in the same department from arraignment to disposition. Judge Jasprica reported that the DART program is progressing well. That program allows a one-time opportunity to have a felony unlawful possession of controlled substance charge dropped to a misdemeanor. Possession charges that include delivery are not eligible for this program.

Judge Jasprica reported that the District Court will establish a Veterans' Court at the beginning of 2018 with a mental health component. Pierce County District Court in response to community needs has developed therapeutic courts along three tracks. In response to the challenges created by the opioid epidemic the DART program has given the Court the flexibility to reward treatment compliance by minimizing the impact of a possible felony drug conviction. Honorable District Court Judge Margaret Ross presides over the dart calendar every week and it continues to grow.

Establishment of the veterans' Court will allow the District Court to focus on the complex needs of veterans and make sure that resources available to veterans are coordinated. The District Court did not come to these conclusions without thorough research and deliberation. Back in 2013 – 14 the Court engaged a firm from New York to perform an assessment of what the Court could do to address the needs of the mentally challenged individuals that come into the District Court criminal justice system. The whole community was called together. In addition to the Court and Court administration, stakeholders from areas of law enforcement; mental health treatment; prosecutors and public defenders and social service organizations were called upon to give their input. As a result of those efforts the behavioral health unit was created in the Probation Department. Pierce County District Court is now taking steps to serve an even greater population of defendants who have demonstrated special needs.

Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier has made a commitment to address mental health issues in the County. He has approved a supplemental budget that would include funds for a mobile emergency response team or (MERT). This team would be valuable in responding to situations in which a mental health component may be involved. The executive has created a fund to reimburse landlords for property damage done by homeless individuals who may be eligible for housing assistance.

Tony Manzanares, Department of Assigned Counsel's lead attorney for the Tacoma Municipal Court reported that the Tacoma City council passed an anti-homeless statute. The statute only allows an individual to stay for a certain period of time in a certain area. Mr. Manzanares predicted that the statute would be challenged. Everyone at this meeting acknowledged the fact that there is a real problem with homelessness in Pierce County. Mr. Manzanares remarked that making it unlawful to stay where the homeless have stayed in the past and failing to give them any alternatives is very problematic.

Jean Hayes Tacoma City Attorney advised the committee that the statute was a temporary measure and due to expire within weeks of the meeting. Ms. Hayes noted that the City appointed a homeless council review the data and came to the conclusion that the statute was the best way to move forward.

Assistant Presiding Judge Elizabeth Verhey of the Tacoma Municipal Court reported that Presiding Judge David Ladenburg is continuing to make progress on the Court's paperless warrant project. Judge Verhey also reported that the Court's Mental Health Calendar is now 2 years old and has seen over 500 mental health defendants in that time. The Mental Health Calendar has primarily focused on competency issues and now, the mental health team, which includes a designated defense attorney, designated City attorney, Pierce County jail mental health, Great Lakes Mental Health, Pierce County and Tacoma designated mental health professionals (includes the Tacoma Police Department mental health co-responders), Jail Transition Services, and the Community Re-entry Program, is now looking at expanding the Mental Health Calendar to include a docket for a Mental Health Court with a therapeutic focus. The Thurston County Mental Health Court and the King County Regional Mental Health Court are being visited and their format is being examined for possible adaptation to the City of Tacoma and the Tacoma Municipal Court. A coordinated approach regarding mental health and homeless issues is also being reviewed because it appears that the two often go hand in hand. Research into a centralized location for services – shelter, food, medical treatment, mental health treatment, medication management, alcohol and drug treatment, and employment training/education classes – is being conducted. The success of the Mental Health Calendar

goes to the entire team, especially the City and Defense attorneys and the Court staff. In addition, since the addition of the co-responders to the Tacoma Police Department there has been an approximately 80% diversion rate (diversion is a mental health contact which results in no arrest and no charges filed & the person being diverted to appropriate assistance/services rather than being booked into jail). Judge Verhey will continue to keep us updated as this project proceeds.

Policy stories of success drive new ideas on ways to better serve mentally challenged defendants. One idea is the bus pass project in District Court Probation. Pierce County has real challenges when it comes to transportation. Pierce County has rural areas as well as urban areas within its borders. Often the only means of transportation for a defendant is Pierce Transit. The bus pass project seeks to supply a defendant with a bus pass to assist with transportation needs whether it be transportation to court hearings, employment or perhaps treatment.

A City and County cooperative task force has been formed with the help of a research and analysis grant to study the impact of opioids on the criminal justice system in Pierce County. Many City attorneys are looking at potential law suits against the pharmaceutical companies in relationship to the epidemic in opioid addiction from prescription pain medications.

2Watch electronic home monitoring was a proud sponsor of a hole at the Tacoma Pierce County bar association golf tournament. Their branch office in Olympia is right across from Thurston Municipal Court and ready for business. 2watch continues to develop templates for Court order electric home monitoring. The feedback from the extra activities forms has been quite good. 2Watch was proud to announce that the savings generated from the department of revenue decision to rescind their previous tax ruling was passed on to the consumer in the form of lower rates.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 16, 2017 at the Harvester Restaurant 29 N Tacoma Ave at 7:30 am. All are welcome.