



Mike Hammond, Knox County Clerk of the Courts

Knox County, TN – Mental Health Court Awarded Adult Mental Health Court Certification

County of Knox, TN — January 6, 2024: Knox County Mental Health Court presiding Judge Chuck Cerny received official notification on December 27, 2024, from the State of Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services that the Knox County Mental Health Court Certification application for meeting all the requirements and standards for certification under the Tennessee Certified Mental Health Court Program. A mental health court program receiving funding from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services must achieve and maintain certification status.

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS), Office of Criminal Justice Services, performed a site visit on December 5, 2024, to certify the Knox County Mental Health Court program. The site visit included observing the mental health court staffing, court sessions, and meeting with participants who volunteered to meet in a group setting to gain insight into how they feel the program is working (participant meetings are confidential and are not included in the written report). The submitted application and supporting documentation also addressed how the program implements and adheres to the Ten Essential Elements of a Mental Health Court and operates the program within the AllRise Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards.

The TDMHSAS concluded the application process by presenting the Knox County Mental Health Court team members with a congratulatory letter for their hard work and dedication to becoming a Tennessee Certified Mental Health Court Program and awarded the Adult Mental Health Court Certificate of Certification. In addition, the TDMHSAS Administrator expressed appreciation for Knox County's commitment to working with justice-involved individuals living with mental illness to support them on their paths to wellness and recovery.

About Knox County Mental Health Court

Established in August 2023, the Knox County Mental Health Court serves referents in the City of Knoxville and Knox County. The Knox County Mental Health Court is presented to eligible individuals as an alternative to probation and/or incarceration. The emphasis of the Court is accountability, monitoring, and treatment for individuals with a mental illness who are charged with non-violent offenses as a possible correlation of their mental illness. Mental Health Courts improve communities by reducing crime rates in individuals suffering from mental illness through evidence-based treatment and support services to assist in their sobriety and re-entry into the community. The Court removes defendants from the high-volume courtrooms of the traditional criminal justice system and places them into a non-threatening environment where treatment and compliance are emphasized.

General Sessions, Criminal Division • 400 Main Street, Suite M-84 • Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

Criminal Court • 400 Main Street, Suite M-149 • Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

4th Circuit Court • 400 Main Street, Suite M-15 • Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

Phone: (865) 215-3455

www.knoxcounty.org/criminalcourt

In this non-adversarial courtroom atmosphere, the Judge and Court Team work together for the common goal of breaking the cycle of untreated mental illness, drug abuse, and criminal behavior to reduce recidivism. The Knox County Mental Health Court is a voluntary program for referents who have a mental illness and have not been successful within the traditional criminal justice system or desire a life of compliance through treatment.

The Knox County Mental Health Court Program is a program that provides eligible defendants the opportunity to receive mental health and drug treatment in exchange for either having their charges dismissed, avoiding prison or jail sentence, or the possibility of having a felony amended to misdemeanor charges. Eligible defendants can elect to participate in the program or proceed with traditional court processing. Defendants come under the court's supervision after choosing to participate in the program. They are required to attend treatment sessions, undergo random drug and alcohol testing, and appear before the Mental Health Court Judge regularly. There are five phases of the Mental Health Court, each consisting of different expectations to be followed by the defendant. Upon completion of all five phases of the program, the participant successfully graduates from Mental Health Court with an after-care plan and an established network of support and treatment services.

To learn more, visit www.criminalcourt.org/courts/mhc

Media Inquiries:

Mental Health Court Advisory Board Chairman

Mike Hammond

Criminal, General Sessions & Fourth Circuit Court Clerk

Mike.Hammond@knoxcounty.org

Mental Health Court Advisory Board Vice-Chairman

Judge Chuck Cerny

General Sessions Judge, Division I

Chuck.Cerny@knoxcounty.org