

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring the First Judicial District's Mental Health Court, one of Pennsylvania's most significant re-entry programs, on the occasion of the program's 10th Anniversary.

WHEREAS, The First Judicial District's Mental Health Court of the Court of Common Pleas is Pennsylvania's first re-entry Mental Health Court; and

WHEREAS, Mental Health Court provides an alternative to incarceration for non-violent offenders with mental illness and co-occurring disorders by preparing them for re-entry into more effective treatments in supervised community settings. The program provides a team of court staff and mental health professionals that work together to screen, assess and supervise individuals, and develop treatment plans; and

WHEREAS, Mental Health Court began formal operations in July 2009, under the supervision of the Honorable Sheila Woods-Skipper, President Judge Emeritus. The program was developed through collaborative efforts of numerous City agencies and criminal justice stakeholders as a targeted effort to support individuals with serious mental illnesses, such as Bipolar Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder, among others; and

WHEREAS, For 10 years, Mental Health Court has continued to facilitate the re-entry of returning citizens into community treatment settings; provide treatment, housing benefits and community support to participants; reduce recidivism among individuals with mental illness; and bolster effective communication between Philadelphia's criminal justice and mental health systems. The program's stakeholders have seen a rate of recidivism of approximately 10 percent amongst those who have completed the program; and

WHEREAS, The success of Mental Health Court has only been possible, because of the individualized approach towards care that the program offers, which is a crucial aspect of the program and a primary focus of the original working group, chaired by Judge Renee Caldwell Hughes, and consisting of representatives from the Department of Behavioral Health/IDS, Defender Association of Philadelphia, the District Attorney's Office, the Philadelphia Department of Prisons and the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Mental Health Court has also benefited from the inimitable and remarkable nature of its first presiding judge, the Honorable Sheila Woods-Skipper. Beyond her role in creating the program, Judge Woods-Skipper has been at the forefront of issues that impact our most vulnerable citizens for her entire career - from her work in mental health to her opening of Pennsylvania's first Elder Justice Resource Center. Judge Woods-Skipper's compassionate demeanor and thoughtful manner have helped countless participants work through challenging life circumstances in order to reach personal milestones, a measure of the program's success that cannot be calculated; and

WHEREAS, As the first court of its kind in the State, the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania has changed the way that Pennsylvania's court system focuses on the reintegration of mentally ill offenders, with a model of treatment, justice and public safety; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby recognizes and honors the First Judicial District's Mental Health Court on the occasion of the program's 10th Anniversary.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania as evidence of the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.