



MEDIA RELEASE

Lincoln County Board of Commissioners

Casey Miller
Public Information Officer
225 West Olive Street
Newport, OR 97365
Phone: 541.265.0211
cmiller@co.lincoln.or.us

LINCOLN COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH COURT VALUABLE INVESTMENT IN BOTH HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

A number of partners have come together to create a Lincoln County Mental Health Court, modeled on the two-year old Drug Court and the more recently established HOPE Court.

Like Drug Court, potential clients who meet eligibility requirements will be offered the options of enrolling in the program, where they agree to comply with a court-supervised program of treatment. The principal incentive for the client to stay with the program is the dismissal of the criminal charges against them once they graduate.

“All of these special courts fall under the broad umbrella of problem solving courts,” said District Attorney Rob Bovett. “They’re all designed to stop the revolving door of the criminal justice system and give people the tools to put their lives back on track. They also have a strong element of accountability.”

Mental Health Courts are not as widespread as Drug Courts. There are an estimated 150 Mental Health Courts in the United States, while there are more than 2,000 Drug Courts. Bovett said both courts have a remarkable track record in saving lives and saving money for taxpayers.

Lincoln County Presiding Judge Charles Littlehales will serve as Mental Health Court Judge. The first session of the court will take place sometime this month (September). The court will initially be limited to a maximum of five participants.

The memorandum of understanding establishing the court is the result of work by a sub-committee of the county’s Local Public Safety Coordinating Council. Lt. Jamie Russell of the sheriff’s office is chair of the committee. Lincoln County’s Behavioral Health program has committed staff time and resources to the program, and a number of other partners have come together to establish the court.

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners has made a special one-time \$10,000 allocation to establish a fund for purchase of prescription medications for Mental Health Court clients. Board Chair Bill Hall explained: “The need for medications was identified as one potential barrier for getting clients into the program. Although many clients are expected to be on the Oregon Health Plan, a number are likely to be indigent.”

Hall said the funding is to provide initial seed money; the intent is to replenish the fund through grants and other fund-raising. “Although times are extremely tight, the board looks at this as a valuable investment in both human services and public safety.”

To reach Lincoln County Public Information Officer, Casey Miller: 541-265-0211 cmiller@co.lincoln.or.us

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