



**HARRIS COUNTY
FELONY MENTAL HEALTH COURT**

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

JUDGE BROCK THOMAS

WELCOME to the Harris County Felony Mental Health Court Program!

What is a mental health court?

A Mental Health court is a problem-solving court in which defendants living with a mental illness are given the opportunity to participate in mental health treatment, make frequent appearances before the Judge and have regularly scheduled visits with a specially trained Community Supervision Officer (probation officer) in place of a prolonged jail or prison sentence.

As a participant in the Felony Mental Health Court (FMHC) Program, you will be expected to follow the instructions given to you by the FMHC Judge, Community Supervision Officer and FMHC Clinical Team as well as comply with a personalized Re-Entry Plan. This Handbook details what is expected of all Felony Mental Health Court participants and reviews general program information. We encourage you to refer to this Handbook frequently and to share it with your family and friends.

What does it take to get into the Felony Mental Health Court?

To be eligible for the FMHC, you must meet the following criteria:

- Currently charged with a felony offense
 - Defendants with a violent felony offense will be considered on a case-by-case basis
- Diagnosed with a significant mental illness
 - Schizophrenia/Schizoaffective Disorder
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - Major Depressive Disorder
- *May* have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder
- Legally competent
- Willing to voluntarily participate in a comprehensive clinical evaluation and commit to an individualized treatment plan, terms of Community Supervision and FMHC standards
- Willing to plead guilty if accepted into the court

In addition, there must be an identified relationship between the mental illness and the behavior which resulted in the criminal charge.

Why should I participate in the FMHC?

The FMHC Team will help you access services and programs such as housing, employment opportunities, mental health services, substance abuse treatment and medical care. We are here to support you and help you remain focused and motivated to reach your goals, successfully complete your probation and live a healthy and productive life. By participating in the court, you may avoid a longer stay in jail or having to go to prison.

What will I have to do if I participate in the FMHC?

As a FMHC participant, you will be expected to:

- Follow all FMHC requirements and Court recommendations
- Follow all of the Probation requirements
- Follow your Re-Entry Plan which will include participating in mental health treatment
- Participate in substance abuse treatment if needed
- Submit to random drug and alcohol testing
- Attend all FMHC Court appearances
- Abstain from drugs and/or alcohol
- Remain law-abiding

What is the FMHC Program like?

When you first start in the FMHC Program, you can expect more intensive treatment from your treatment providers and more rigorous supervision from the Court and your Community Supervision Officer. As you demonstrate to the Judge that you are successfully managing your treatment and Conditions of Supervision, the Judge may consider reducing the frequency and intensity of your court appearances. Your Treatment Providers will be responsible for determining the intensity of your treatment.

How long will I be in the FMHC?

Each probationer in the FMHC program is **required to participate for at least 18 months** (1 and ½ years). After that, the Judge will review your case every 3 months to see if graduation is appropriate. Some probationers complete the FMHC program before the end of their sentence and some serve their entire sentence with the Court in order to receive the additional support from the Judge and FMHC Team.

Will I have legal representation?

Since most participants in the Court cannot afford the on-going services of a lawyer, they are represented by the Public Defender's Office. You will meet the Public Defender after you enter your plea and become a FMHC participant. This attorney will be present at court staffings with the FMHC Team and at your Court appearances when you meet with the Judge. Your attorney will represent your interest if you request changes to your treatment plan, will advocate for you if the Court is considering sanctions, will request modified Conditions of Supervision or early termination of probation, and, should it be necessary, will represent you at a hearing to revoke probation or adjudicate guilt. You must hire your own attorney if you have the funds to do so.

Who will have access to my records?

In order to ensure that we have all of the information that is necessary to provide you with the most effective Re-Entry Plan and Supervision Plan, we will be requesting copies of your medical, mental health and psychological records throughout the course of your participation in the FMHC. In order to guard your privacy, the FMHC Team will ensure that no one outside of the FMHC Team will have access to your protected health information. Only court orders and official documents (such as conditions of probation, motions to adjudicate guilt or revoke probation and judgments and sentences) will be placed in the court's public file. Protected Health Information (such as medical records) will be filed in a separate FMHC file which will only be available to the FMHC Team.

When do I appear for Court?

Initially, you will attend Court on a weekly basis. As you demonstrate to the Judge and FMHC Team that you are adhering to the rules of the Court and Conditions of Supervision the frequency of your court appearances will be reduced. Attending Court is a vital component of participation in the FMHC Program. **On days when you are scheduled to be in Court you will not schedule meetings, appointments or work obligations** that interfere with your 2:30 Court appearance.

What happens prior to my scheduled FMHC Court appearance?

Before each FMHC appearance, your Treatment Provider, Community Supervision Officer and other FMHC Team members will give the Judge a progress report. The progress report will address how you're doing in-between court appearances – such as how things are going for you at home, at school, work or with your family and how you're doing in treatment -- your attendance,

participation and cooperation with your Treatment Provider, as well as an update on how you're doing with your Conditions of Supervision.

What happens during my scheduled FMHC Court appearance?

It differs a little from a regular court appearance in that the goal of the FMHC is to help you succeed with your treatment and probation. Therefore, the Judge takes a special interest in your treatment and probation experiences and will ask you at each appearance how you think you are doing and will want to discuss any problems you might be having.

You are given the opportunity to tell the Judge about any concerns you have so that your concerns are addressed and a course of action determined. If you are meeting your treatment goals and following your Conditions of Supervision, you may be eligible for an incentive (discussed below). If you are *not* meeting your treatment goals or following your Conditions of Supervision, the next course of action may include a clinical intervention or sanction (discussed below).

How should I behave in Court?

- Attend all FMHC court appearances - All absences require prior approval from the FMHC Team. Failure to appear in court may result in a bench warrant being issued for your arrest.
- Be on time
- Check-in with the Deputy when you arrive
- Turn your cell phone off and do not use any portable electronic equipment in the courtroom
- Remain alert so that you can hear your name as you are called to the Bench
- Do not bring food, gum or beverages into the courtroom
- Once court is in session, any talking without the Judge's consent is unacceptable and may result in removal from the Courtroom and a sanction
- Wear appropriate clothing and remove your hat while inside the courtroom

How will I know I'm doing a good job?

Incentives and sanctions for behavior are an important part of the FMHC program. In order to help you change the behaviors that get you in the most trouble, the Judge and the FMHC Team will work with you on developing and applying meaningful rewards and consequences. Program compliance and positive behavior changes are rewarded with incentives. Incentives are responses to positive progress in the program. The type of incentive will vary depending on the behavior that we want to recognize and the things that motivate you as an individual.

Incentives for compliance include but are not limited to:

- Inclusion in weekly All Star list
- Acknowledgment and praise from the Judge
- Reduced frequency of court appearances
- Decreased intensity of supervision (e.g. fewer meetings with Community Supervision Officer)
- Decreased drug testing
- Granting of privileges (e.g. travel permit)
- Phase advancement
- Graduation
- Early termination of probation

How will I know if I'm *not* doing a good job?

Non-compliant and undesirable behaviors are addressed immediately through the application of sanctions. The Judge applies the principle of graduated and least restrictive sanctions based on both current and previous behavior. Similar to the concept that we apply to incentives, the type of sanction that the Judge selects will vary depending on the behavior that needs to be addressed and the things that motivate you as an individual.

Sanctions for noncompliance with FMHC program rules may include but are not limited to:

- Exclusion from weekly All Star list
- Judicial reprimands
- Increased frequency in court appearances
- Rotated to the bottom of the docket (one of the last to be seen by the Judge)
- Behavior contract
- Delay in phase advancement or regress to prior phase
- Written assignments
- Increased intensity of supervision (e.g. more frequent meetings with Community Supervision Officer)
- Increased drug testing
- Loss of privileges (e.g. travel permit denied)
- Community service hours
- Jail remand
- Termination from the FMHC program/sentencing

What if I don't follow the rules?

In applying sanctions and determining whether your case should be set for a hearing to adjudicate guilt or revoke probation, the Judge will consider many factors including but not limited to:

- Your attitude throughout your participation in the Court
- Your compliance history
- Severity of your mental illness or drug/alcohol addiction
- Your criminal record
- Whether you are stable enough to participate in the FMHC Program
- Whether you have become legally incompetent
- Likelihood of serious physical harm to yourself or others that is unmanageable in a community setting

What happens when I reach all of my goals?

Once your participation with the FMHC has come to an end, you and your family will be invited to join in celebration as the Judge congratulates you on successfully completing the program and achieving your goals and establishing stability in your life. The Judge will review your case for early termination of probation. If you continue on probation, you may be moved from the more intensive mental health caseload to a less intensive standard caseload where the requirements are less rigorous.

When are Graduation Dockets?

Graduation Dockets are conducted two (2) times a year – on the last Thursday in April and October.

Who will I be working with?

Under the leadership of Judge Brock Thomas, a team of professionals has been assembled to help you make positive changes in your life. Your FMHC Team is comprised of the following people:

Brock Thomas	Judge
Drue Gaines	Program Director
Norma Lopez	Court Coordinator
Giuliana Lozano	Court Clinician
Jewlina Coleman-King	Court Clinician
Lunden Davis	Clinical Case Manager
Romithea Stallworth	Court Liaison Officer
Sonja Scurlock	Community Supervision Officer (Monday)
Courtney Clark	Community Supervision Officer (Thursday)
Erica Robinson	Assistant District Attorney (Monday)
Sara Siegel	Assistant District Attorney (Thursday)
Tanya Kelley	Assistant Public Defender/Defense Counsel (Thursday)

And **YOU!** Yes, you are a part of the team. You will have an active role in developing and, of course, following your Re-Entry Plan as well as adhering to the requirements of the FMHC program and Community Supervision. By participating in the FMHC, you will have the support and encouragement of the entire FMHC Team to help you stay focused as you work towards achieving your goals. Keep in mind, it will be *your* motivation, *your* commitment and *your* dedication to yourself and to your goals that will ultimately determine your success in the Felony Mental Health Court.

Important Contact Information

Felony Mental Health Court Main Line	(832) 927-4350
Your FMHC Court Clinician : Giuliana Lozano	(832) 927-4351
Your FMHC Court Clinician : Jewlina Coleman-King	(346) 286-5541
Your FMHC Clinical Case Manager is: Lunden Davis	(346) 286-5499
Your Defense Attorney is: Tanya Kelley	(713) 274-6936
Your (Monday) Community Supervision Officer is: Sonja Scurlock	(346) 286-5054
Your (Thursday) Community Supervision Officer is: Courtney Clark	(346) 286-5069
Your Court Liaison Officer is: Romithea Stallworth	(346) 286-5580
 The Harris Center for Mental Illness and IDD Services Main Central Number	 (713) 970-7000
Neuropsychiatric Center (NPC)	(713) 970-7070
The Harris Center for Mental Illness and IDD Services Crisis Hotline	(713) 970-7000
or text	(832) 479-2135

Conclusion

The FMHC Program has been developed to help you achieve stability in your life. The Program is designed to promote your self-awareness, independence and to return you to the community as a productive and responsible citizen. Your Judge, Community Supervision Officer, FMHC Clinical Team, Attorney and Treatment Provider are available to guide and assist you, but the final choice is yours.

We hope this handbook has been helpful and answered most of your questions. If you have any additional questions or concerns about the FMHC program, please feel free to contact your attorney or the FMHC Clinical Team at (832) 927-4350 or email us at FMHC@csc.hctx.net.

Welcome to the FMHC Team!