

Franklin County Municipal Court Receives State Certification of its Mental Health Specialized Docket

The Franklin County Municipal Court's Mental Health Specialized Docket has earned final certification from the Supreme Court of Ohio's Commission on Specialized Dockets.

In January 2014, new certification standards as adopted by the Supreme Court went into effect. In order to receive the certification, Judge Scott D. VanDerKarr, who presides over the Mental Health program, had to submit an application, provide specific program materials, and undergo a site inspection.

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor congratulated the Franklin County Municipal Court and Judge VanDerKarr for receiving final certification.

"Specialized dockets have proven effective at addressing persistent criminal behaviors," said Chief Justice O'Connor. "Specialized dockets result in significantly lower recidivism rates, which means offenders become productive members of society, for which we all benefit."

Specialized dockets are problem-solving courts that target certain populations based on the type of offense or on the traits of offenders. Specialized dockets use a combination of different techniques to hold offenders accountable while also addressing underlying causes, which usually include mental health disorders or drug and alcohol dependency. There are more than 150 specialized dockets in Ohio courts that deal with issues such as: Drugs and Alcohol, Mental Health, Domestic Violence, and Sex Offenses.

The new standards provide a minimum level of uniform practices for specialized dockets throughout Ohio, and allow local courts to innovate and tailor programming to meet their community's needs and resources.

"I am pleased that the Mental Health program has received certification from the Supreme Court, and I appreciate the help and support from all of our community partners, who really make the program successful. Since its inception in 2004, the Mental Health program has had a significant impact on many participants who have returned to the community, where they hold jobs, pay taxes, buy houses, and do not commit other crimes. Franklin County benefits as well because the participants spend less time in jail than they would if left untreated and not held accountable. While mental health courts are helping people, this program is just the tip of the iceberg, and much more needs to be done to help meet the mental health needs of residents in Franklin County and the City of Columbus."

Recommended practices outlined in the certification process include establishing eligibility requirements, evaluating effectiveness of the specialized docket, and assembling a treatment team for implementing daily operations of the specialized docket. The team is led by the specialized docket judge and can include licensed treatment providers, law enforcement, and court personnel.

The [Commission on Specialized Dockets](#) has 22 members who advise the Supreme Court and its staff regarding the promotion of statewide rules and uniform standards concerning specialized dockets in Ohio courts; the development and delivery of specialized docket services to Ohio courts; and the creation of training programs for judges and court personnel. The commission makes all decisions regarding final certification.