



News from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Mayor Mark H. Luttrell, Jr.

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Shelby County's Mental Health Court Opens Next Week

State Commissioner of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Will Attend Ribbon-Cutting

Shelby County Mayor Mark H. Luttrell, Jr. and Shelby County General Sessions Division Nine (9) Judge Gerald Skahan will welcome Commissioner Doug Varney of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for next week's opening of the Shelby County Mental Health Court. The event will be held on Tuesday, February 2, 1:45 p.m., in the General Sessions Division Nine (9) Court, Lower Level of 201 Poplar Avenue.

"It's vital we address the underlying reasons for criminal behavior. The Shelby County Mental Health Court will ensure the offender gets the needed assistance to reduce the chance of reoffending. This specialized court will be an effective and innovative asset to our criminal justice system by providing an alternative to incarceration," said Shelby County Mayor Mark H. Luttrell Jr.

In December 2014, Mayor Luttrell and Commissioner Varney met to discuss the plan for a Shelby County Mental Health Court. Their meeting led to an action team which established the objectives of the specialized court:

- 1) Improve public safety by helping offenders keep from being rearrested
- 2) Ensure offenders get needed treatment for their mental illnesses
- 3) Reduce operational costs for the jail, corrections center and court systems

"It can be cruel to see those suffering from mental health issues make repeated trips to jail," said General Sessions Judge Gerald Skahan. **"Many of us in the court know these offenders by name and know their illness likely led to their criminal charges,"** added Judge Skahan.

The average daily census at the Shelby County Jail is about 2,400 inmates. Of those, an estimated 500 inmates have a mental health diagnosis and have been arrested many times: 21 percent had three (3) bookings, 18 percent had five (5) or more bookings and 12 percent had ten (10) or more.

"I'm really proud of the partnership with Shelby County for putting this together, and I'd like to commend Judge Skahan for agreeing to lead this court. There are many individuals with serious mental illnesses that can be better served by diversion from the criminal justice system. The mayor and his staff have done a wonderful job in organizing and implementing this effort," said Commissioner Varney.

(End of Release)