

## **ASKING FOR SUPPORT OF CAMPAIGN TO ESTABLISH FULL-FLEDGED MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT COURT IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY**

January 12, 2021

Milwaukee County has had a pilot mental health treatment court, serving five to seven persons at a time, for the past five to six years—thanks to the leadership of retired Chief Judge Jeffrey Kremers. However, there is agreement among the judicial/correctional stakeholders in Milwaukee County that there is a need for a full-fledged mental health treatment court, serving 75 to 85 persons at a time.

The MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope) Prison Reform Task Force has been working for the past year to establish a full-fledged mental health treatment court and is working at the State level and at the County level, to make this happen. There are many individuals and organizations in Milwaukee County who are in support of the effort and would be ready to assist, once they know how they can help. This communication is to let such persons know how they can help at this stage of the campaign.

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to contact the Governor's office by phone, email, or regular mail—by February 1—with the following ask:

Basic message to the Governor: Please be sure that the 2021-2022 budget increases the funding for TAD (Treatment Alternatives and Diversionary) programming to \$30 million, and that the budget amends the TAD legislation to include mental health treatment courts, as well as the drug treatment courts already included.

Supporting rationale for this request that you may use, depending on your personal perspective and on the preferred length of your message:

—There are hundreds of persons entering the judicial system every year who have mental health issues, and not drug addiction or co-occurring disorders, and who need treatment, not incarceration. Under the current TAD legislation they are not eligible for an alternative or diversionary treatment court .

—Incarceration for persons with mental health issues almost always exacerbates the mental health condition, so that they are prone to suicide, and are in worse condition when they are released than when they went in.

—When persons with mental health issues are diverted from incarceration by placing them in a mental health treatment court, they are held accountable for maintaining their medical regimen and they are able to maintain connections with family and friends and with a job—all of which contributes to the person’s health and productivity.

—Recent research indicates that for every dollar the state spends on alternative programming, the state saves over four dollars, and for every dollar the state spends on diversionary programming, it saves over eight dollars.

A short testimony as to why you are concerned about this issue always helps.

The reason why it is so important to get the Governor to put this into the budget is because the Joint Finance Committee—that has to approve the budget—is likely to leave it in the budget. However, asking the Joint Finance Committee to put it into the budget if the Governor hasn't—which they can do—is very unlikely.

Here is the contact information for Governor Tony Evers: P.O Box 7863, Madison, WI 53707-7863; or 608-266-1212; or <[eversinfo@wisconsin.gov](mailto:eversinfo@wisconsin.gov)>.

Thank you for responding to this request and for sharing it with others. Establishing a full-fledged mental health treatment court in Milwaukee County could keep over a hundred persons per year from being incarcerated and could keep them on a track of healthy, productive living.

> For more information: Rev. Joseph W. Ellwanger, 414-795-2343 or <[Joe.ellwanger@gmail.com](mailto:Joe.ellwanger@gmail.com)>. If you are interested in joining the MICAHC (Restoring Our Communities) Prison Reform Task Force, send your email data to Wendel Hruska, ROC Task Force, Co-Chair, <[wendel@proectreturnmilwaukee.org](mailto:wendel@proectreturnmilwaukee.org)>. He will send you the link to the ZOOM platform. The MICAHC ROC Task Force meets every second Tuesday, 5:00 PM. Next meeting: Wed., Feb. 13, 5:00 PM.