

To: BOCC

From: Sophia Limacher, Superior Court, Mental Health Court Program Coordinator

Re: Superior Court Re-Org Read ahead

Date: March 14, 2024

Re-org Request

We are requesting the Board approval on the creation of a new Assistant Program Coordinator position (Grade 119). This position will provide support to the Mental Health Court Program Coordinator in the form of administrative duties, case management, community outreach and allow the existing program to support a larger target population by collaborating with the City of Chehalis in facilitating a Municipal Treatment Court. We would like to consider this a “pilot” or “project” position and review the success and funding in one year.

See the proposed org chart and job description for reference.

Budget

New proposed position at grade 119, step 1, including salary and benefits package: \$81,294
Budget impact encompassed and inclusive of the CJTA contract under the umbrella of Public Health and Social Services.

Criminal Justice Treatment Account fund to pay: \$40,647

Interlocal Agreement with the City of Chehalis to pay up to \$50,000

See the budget worksheet and CJTA contract.

Background

In 2015, Superior Court, in collaboration with the Lewis County Prosecutor’s Office, Jail and other community partners established a post-conviction treatment sentencing alternative called the Mental Health Alternative (MHA) in response to increasing numbers of individuals with high acuity mental health and cooccurring disorders entering the justice system. Cascade Community Healthcare provided treatment services and appointed an employee to case manage the program, meeting weekly with the Court Administrator to track progress, attend periodic court reviews, and work with local agencies to coordinate support services for participants. The MHA existed in this capacity from June of 2015 until January of 2018 when Superior Court created a full time position to support the growing needs of the program.

The MHA rebranded to the Mental Health Court Program (MHCP) in 2018, went from post to pre-conviction, and doubled in size in the first year. The MHCP is a 24 month (can be longer or shorter based on individual performance and compliance) program, resulting in a dismissal for those who successfully complete. The program provides structure and accountability to support wellness and recovery, connecting participants to comprehensive and individualized treatment support services, and intensive case management to promote long term stability, sobriety, and safety.

The need has remained overwhelmingly present, and the program grown by 48% over the last six years, with an average caseload of 25 participants. The MHCP has served over 100 individuals (both those who have completed and not completed the program), with a 61% completion rate and 7% recidivism rate (State average 25%).

In November of 2023 Chehalis City Attorney Kevin Nelson and Chehalis Municipal Court Judge Allen Unzelman approached Superior Court to assist in implementing a Chehalis Treatment Court, effectively reaching the same population, but before the crimes escalate to the felony level. See *Chehalis City Council Meeting Agenda for reference*. The City of Chehalis has proposed to pay equivalent to half the salary of the Assistant Program Coordinator position (including benefits package) and in return the MHPC would provide part-time support and case management for the operation of Chehalis treatment Court. The other half of the salary Superior Court has received CJTA approval to fund.

This fulfills an existing need in the current program and expands our reach, better serving the community. We see this as a win-win and would like to consider this a “pilot” or “project” position and review the success and funding in one year.