

LEGAL SERVICES/CRIMINAL JUSTICE/SPECIALTY COURTS SUBCOMMITTEE
4.5.22 11:45 AM- 1:15 PM
via Zoom and at City Hall

In Attendance: Avalon “Mal” Mallory, Kelly Richards, Cathy White, Beth Blake, Judy Naylor, Blake Majzun, Kaitlyn Bonam, Melissa Johnson, Allison Patton, Connie Bookman, Blair Castro

Discussion:

The group discussed the possibility of creating a Homeless Specialty Court to help address specific needs of the homeless community. Melissa spoke some of the legal issues the people she is working with now are experiencing.

Kelly went through the process of what exactly happens when people are Baker Acted from the Public Defender’s side. These people have to meet the very strict criteria of being in danger of harming themselves or others. Melissa mentioned that many people who are being evaluated for Baker Act actually memorize the answers to their questions while being interviews, and are then able to get past these evaluations.

Cathy expressed that one major obstacle would be getting a Judge to volunteer their time to administer the court. She had previously brought this up to Chief Judge Miller and Court Administrator Robin Wright, and they said that the hardest thing would be getting a Judge to volunteer their time and not having the infrastructure in place to really start a new court system. Because of this this, we may want to focus on strengthening the resources we have instead of creating a whole new specialty court. Allison mentioned the possibility of potentially getting a study done via the Levin Foundation possibly and getting together a more strategic plan to deliver results and put this kind of program in place. While it may be hard to implement a homeless court at the moment, it may be a good idea to map out the best course of action for ways to help homeless in relation to criminal justice. We could also provide data that this type of program would be cost effective and save the law enforcement community money.

Judge Goodman has shared there may be an appetite for this kind of program if there was funding available to do a study on the benefits.

Melissa suggested that a team of “friends” get together to go out to each campsite and find out what each individual person needs and get people off the streets. Allison mentioned that another county is actually doing this (The “Green Shirt” idea) in south Florida. Cathy mentioned that PPD, ECSO and Lakeview are currently partnering to develop teams to go out to these sites and address the needs of the homeless.

Connie reminded members that the May 3rd retreat will allow for discussion on each subcommittee's next steps and encouraged each member to show up at Sanders Beach on this day.

Allison says it will be a great idea to identifying barriers that people are experiencing before we can discuss beginning this court system.

Kelly mentioned we could possibly make the Homeless Court quasi-legal and separate from the entire court system. Allison said that Judge Goodman had the idea that maybe the Clerk's Office could get data or information on what charges homeless are getting. Allison mentioned that we could possibly use data that is already available instead of collecting it ourselves.

The group also discussed helping raise funds or pay off fines for those who have that obstacles prior to being housed.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 12:40 PM