



## Mental Health Public Defender



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### Program Description:

The Travis County Mental Health Public Defender (MHPD) Office began in April, 2007 to serve the needs of persons with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Our staff includes two lawyers, two social workers, two case workers and two support staff.

The social workers and the case workers are also available to assist private court appointed attorneys. Referrals are made for a variety of social services. Follow-up case management services are also provided.



*Melissa Shearer, attorney; Valerie Whiting, LCSW, Case Management Coordinator; Patrick Wentworth, caseworker; Stephanie Doyle, LMSW; Jeanette Kinard, Chief Public Defender.*

*Not Pictured: Bernice Macias, Office Specialist; Christina Rodriguez, Legal Secretary; and Karen Hunt, caseworker.*

### Referral Procedures:

Cases are primarily referred to the MHPD through Travis County Court Administration. Referrals are also made by judges, attorneys, pre-trial services or mental health advocacy groups.

### Eligibility Requirements...

- ❖ Must be a Travis County case;
- ❖ Must be a misdemeanor;
- ❖ Client must be defined as indigent according to the county-standard definition ;
- ❖ Must have at least one major priority population diagnosis including schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, major depression and/or schizoaffective disorder;
- ❖ Must NOT have a Travis County felony or felony probation pending.

“The Mental health Public Defender Office will help link our criminal justice system with community-based mental health resources that can help these defendants better manage their illness and reduce the chances that they will recycle through our jail system. Creating this type of office is one of the steps the county is taking to try to break the cycle and help offenders stabilize their lives.”

Travis County Judge, Sam Biscoe

The Travis County Mental Health Public Defender office is operated in connection with Travis County Criminal Justice Planning

The Travis County Mental Health Public Defender office is funded by a grant provided by the Task Force on Indigent Defense.

