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Mayor Fulop & Municipal Court Recognize Mental Health Awareness Month with Increased Access to Specialized Services Citywide

Fulop Administration's Multi-pronged Efforts to Address Mental Health Prove Successful

JERSEY CITY - Mayor Steven M. Fulop joins the **Jersey City Municipal Court** and **Municipal Prosecutor's Office** to recognize ***Mental Health Awareness Month*** as we conclude the month of May by highlighting the work of a diversionary specialty court designed to holistically address mental health issues in connection with the criminal justice system. Jersey City's specialized Mental Health Court diverts individuals with underlying mental health conditions from traditional prosecution into community-based treatment.

"We recognized early on that mental health treatment needs to be much more accessible to those who need it most so that we can assist them in becoming active and productive members of the community rather than the alternatives," said **Mayor Fulop**. "We established the specialized court as a more holistic way to better address the underlying root causes that may be contributing to a person's involvement in the criminal justice system, and, in turn, we've been able to reduce recidivism and ultimately improve public safety and quality of life for the community overall."

Since the successful implementation of the Mental Health Court in 2013, Jersey City continues to develop wide-ranging programs to identify and address areas where mental health often plays a large role. Recent programs of note include the community-driven crisis response to address behavioral health for non-dangerous 911 emergency calls as well as the launch of Teen Mental Health Sessions this month in partnership with the schools.

In addition to the legal and programmatic outcomes, the core function of the Mental Health Court is to collaborate with the Municipal Prosecutor, defense attorneys, psychiatrists, and social workers on devising and overseeing a treatment plan for each litigant's specific needs.

Established in partnership with the Jersey City Medical Center and housed in the Jersey City Municipal Court, the honorable **Municipal Court Judge Kelly Austin** has presided over the Court. "It's very easy to say that mental health should be a priority and self-care a necessity. However, it's not as easy as it sounds," said Judge

Austin. “My Court is here to change that. We are here to help defendants navigate the complex mental health system and actively engage in treatment, all while offering encouragement and support as needed.”

Litigants who receive treatment and successfully complete the program may then have their charges reduced or dismissed with criminal records expunged expeditiously. This serves as an alternative to prosecution allowing individuals to avoid the imposition of criminal penalties, including potential incarceration.

“It is undisputed that mental illness contributes significantly to crime and disorder. Many in the criminal justice system are hesitant to compel offenders to seek the treatment that they need and deserve,” said **Municipal Prosecutor Jake Hudnut**. “We in Jersey City have a robust mental health court program that connects offenders with meaningful services and resources. Through this program, we are able to apply justice and remedial services simultaneously that will ultimately lower recidivism. We are proud to have built a culture where Jersey City prosecutors are not simply case processors but are active problem solvers.”

In addition to mental health treatment, participants are also referred for substance abuse treatment and a variety of social services, including job training, employment, and housing assistance.

“The Jersey City Municipal Court has been a leader in establishing and supporting alternative justice programs and courts. Our Mental Health Court, which has been recognized by the State Judiciary, is providing a critical function in addressing mental health challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated,” said **Honorable Ramy A. Eid, Jersey City Municipal Court Chief Judge**.

“Best practices require a whole-of-government approach to effectively handle mental health issues. As Director of the Jersey City Municipal Court, I have made it a priority to ensure full administrative support for our Mental Health Court in order for our local judiciary to play its part in meeting this challenge,” added **Jersey City Municipal Court Director Wendy Razzoli**.

All media inquiries should be directed to Kimberly Scalcione at KScalcione@icnj.org.