

NEWS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

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GRADUATES CELEBRATED FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COURT

Judge Dismisses, Reduces Criminal Charges for Graduates During BHC Ceremony

SAN FRANCISCO – Hosted by San Francisco Superior Court Judge Harry M. Dorfman, families, friends and case workers today attended a graduation ceremony for 17 graduates of the Behavioral Health Court (BHC), one of San Francisco’s collaborative court programs that promotes public safety and helps defendants return to productive, crime free lives.

“This is a proud day for the Court, the clients and their families,” Judge Dorfman said. “BHC is a partnership in the truest sense. We are pleased to have successful collaborations with our justice partners and with community agencies like the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which has been instrumental in settling people into stable housing. Our mentoring and peer support group is a game-changer. They help us to get clients to their appointments. I have presided over BHC for two years and it has been one of the best things I have done.”

District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman was the guest speaker for today’s celebration in Department 15 at the Hall of Justice.

“The hard work and dedication demonstrated to get to this point should be celebrated in a big way,” Supervisor Mandelman said. “These individuals are part of this vibrant City, and through their successful completion of BHC, they have made positive contributions to themselves and the community. After visiting BHC earlier this year, I understand what a real asset this program is to our city. Kudos to the BHC team for making this court a success.”

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SFSC/BHC
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BHC addresses the complex needs of mentally ill participants through a collaborative effort with Jail Behavioral Health and Reentry Services, UCSF's Citywide Case Management, Department of Public Health Public, Office of the Public Defender, Office of the District Attorney, Adult Probation, and the Sheriff's Department. BHC connects the participants to mental health and drug treatment, and medication management to address a participant's mental illness. Through BHC, participants work to secure and maintain employment and stable housing, which are core parts of a comprehensive case management plan overseen and monitored frequently by the Judge for compliance and completion.

Participation in BHC is voluntary. Participants receive an initial evaluation by Jail Behavioral Health and Reentry Services. The District Attorney reviews the case for legal eligibility. The clinical case managers put together an individual treatment plan and participants attend court for judicial monitoring of their progress. On average, it takes about 18 months to complete BHC. Upon successful completion, participants will have their criminal charges dismissed or reduced.

"I am incredibly proud of these graduates and of the work we're doing with our partners to produce these outcomes," said District Attorney George Gascón. "These are collaborative efforts that enhance public safety by reducing recidivism, all while enabling individuals suffering from behavioral health problems to get back to living healthy lives."

Public Defender Jeff Adachi added, "the Behavioral Health Court is an innovative model of providing critical wrap-around services to those who desperately need mental health treatment. To borrow the words of Maya Angelou, 'Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.' We rejoice in the collective achievements of these BHC graduates and look forward to continued progress and success in the future."

Here are some BHC statistics:

- Since 2004, nearly 500 graduates have successfully participated in the program, leading to reduced sentences or full dismissal of criminal charges;
- After 18 months, 26 percent of BHC participants were less likely to be charged with a new offense; 55 percent were less likely to be charged with a new violent offense*;
- In 2017:
 - 67 percent of new clients have a Primary Diagnosis of Schizophrenia; 14 percent Psychotic Disorder; and 14 percent Bipolar;
 - 72 percent of new clients report a history of homelessness; and
 - 38 percent of clients that completed BHC were homeless at entry, and at graduation 93 percent had stable housing.

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Established in 2002, BHC is a collaboration of the San Francisco Superior Court, San Francisco Department of Public Health, Office of the District Attorney, Office of the Public Defender, Sheriff's Department, Adult Probation Department, Police Department, Citywide Forensics Case Management, Jail Behavioral Health and Reentry Services, and numerous other community partners.

* McNeil, D. E., and Binder, R. L. (2007). Effectiveness of a mental health court in reducing criminal recidivism and violence. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 164, 1395-1403.

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