



**Travis County**  
Behavioral Health and  
Criminal Justice  
Advisory Committee

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with pleasure that the Travis County Behavioral Health and Justice Advisory Committee (BHCJAC) write this letter of support for Integral Care's request for funding for their Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (EMCOT). The BHCJAC is a collaborative association comprised of 24 representatives from various criminal justice and behavioral health stakeholders, chaired by Judge Tamara Needles, and our mission is to develop and sustain a planning partnership to support persons with behavioral health needs and to promote justice and public safety.

We strongly support Integral Care's request for funding from the City of Austin and Travis County in accordance with our guiding principles, particularly our assertion that the dignity and rights of individuals with behavioral health disorders are safeguarded by seeking alternative solutions to traditional criminal justice responses at each intercept on the Sequential Intercept Model when appropriate; further, a commitment to the pursuit of a just, safe, and healthy community requires a robust array of community-based behavioral health services. Integral Care's EMCOT focuses its work on the critical Intercept One of the Sequential Intercept Model by preventing the overuse and misuse of arrests during a mental health crisis by providing on-site assessment, crisis intervention, and alternative dispositions to safely address the crisis while avoiding detention/incarceration.

EMCOT was established with DSRIP funding from the 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver which allowed communities like ours to develop and implement transformational healthcare projects and receive federal matching funds to support the projects. The original Waiver has changed from a waiver focused on metrics for individual projects to one that is focused on metrics for Integral Care's system of services. This means that Integral Care no longer has a sustainable funding source for EMCOT as they must shift resources to meet requirements of the new waiver. They have funded EMCOT for the remainder of FY18 and are seeking support for the continuation of this program.

Individuals identified through EMCOT would have linkages to Integral Care's nationally certified and recognized services. Integral Care is accredited by the Joint Commission and recently designated as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC).

There are no other behavioral health teams in Travis County that are dispatched via first responders for immediate, on-site response during a mental health crisis to provide appropriate assessment and intervention with a goal of preventing unnecessary arrests and hospitalizations. In FY 2017 (September 2016 – August 2017), EMCOT received 4,480 referrals from crisis calls to 911, law enforcement and EMS. The reduction of capacity for EMCOT response, or the loss of EMCOT, would be detrimental to our community and a step backwards for people living with behavioral health disorders—in the absence of EMCOT, the first opportunity for diversion for an individual would not be until they had already been



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arrested and detained at Central Booking, which is a much longer, more legally complicated process that can further deteriorate an individual's mental health and social circumstances.

We sincerely support your decision to fund Integral Care's EMCOT as our community strives to strengthen pre-arrest diversion opportunities for those experiencing mental health crises. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tamara Needles', written over the text 'your consideration.'.

Judge Tamara Needles

Chair

Travis County Behavioral Health / Criminal Justice Advisory Committee



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To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is being submitted by the Travis County Behavioral Health and Justice Advisory Committee (BHCJAC) in support of Pretrial Services' request for funding the Mental Health Jail Diversion (MHJD) program. The BHCJAC is a collaborative association comprised of 24 representatives from various criminal justice and behavioral health stakeholders, chaired by Judge Tamara Needles, and our mission is to develop and sustain a planning partnership to support persons with behavioral health needs and to promote justice and public safety.

We strongly support Pretrial Services' request for funding in accordance with our guiding principles, particularly our assertion that the dignity and rights of individuals with behavioral health disorders are safeguarded by seeking alternative solutions to traditional criminal justice responses at each intercept on the Sequential Intercept Model when appropriate; further, a commitment to the pursuit of a just, safe, and healthy community requires a robust array of community-based behavioral health services. Pretrial Services' MHJD program focuses its work within Intercept Two of the Sequential Intercept Model by identifying individuals in jail with mental health needs, and by assessing and coordinating services in the community to secure their release on personal bond. The program seeks to bolster their success at complying with Court requirements and address their mental health needs. The program achieves this by assessing their needs; establishing a release plan and coordinating their release; and by providing intensive support and case management services.

The Mental Health Jail Diversion program was funded by Travis County as a three year pilot program starting October of 2015. The program works in close collaboration with Integral Care's Mental Health Bond Program. The collaboration consists of two caseworkers funded by Travis County and two caseworkers employed by Integral Care and funded through the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI).

The program allows for individuals to be safely released from jail into the community with assurances that Court obligations will be met and thereby reducing the number of days individuals are incarcerated while awaiting trial and avoiding the associated costs of detaining these individuals. In addition, the program provides intensive support to these defendants to address their mental health and social needs to minimize future jail involvement. Absent the specially-trained caseworkers in the program, identifying and coordinating the release of mentally ill defendants would be challenging. There is also no alternative supervision to ensure these clients can find and access community resources to assist in their treatment and stabilization in the community. It is likely that this population would remain in jail until their case disposition. For defendants with mental health diagnoses who are awaiting the disposition of their cases, the county achieves better criminal justice and clinical outcomes, and





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generates potential cost avoidances, if these defendants, where appropriate, are provided case management and services in the community rather than in the county jail.

The Behavioral Health and Justice Advisory Committee strongly encourages that a program evaluation be conducted to monitor the effectiveness of the Mental Health Jail Diversion program. The total FY 2019 budget request for the MHJD program is \$131,342.

We are supportive of the decision to move forward with funding Pretrial Services' MHJD program which further strengthen jail diversion opportunities for defendants with mental illness. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tamara Needles'.

Judge Tamara Needles

Chair

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