



Office of the District Attorney

Gordon P. McLaughlin, District Attorney

8th Judicial District

Serving Larimer and Jackson Counties

VISION: To protect and serve Larimer and Jackson counties, while creating a stronger community where the application of criminal justice is more equitable and no longer at odds with social justice.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and, in the Criminal Justice System, treatment of mental health is essential to our mission of community safety and finding just outcomes in the cases we handle. Mental health struggles, of widely varying degrees, are a significant contributing factor to many cases we see at the District Attorney's Office and addressing the root causes of crime is the best way to ensure that someone doesn't commit the same offense again. In other words, accountability through rehabilitation is often the most reliable way to reduce recidivism.

Across our community we have seen mental health needs on the rise for decades and the COVID pandemic exacerbated an already severe problem. Many cases we see involve low-level offenses, first-time or young offenders, and those experiencing identifiable and treatable mental health challenges. When our deputy district attorneys evaluate a case, they are trained to spot struggles with mental health, addiction, and other systemic obstacles that may have contributed to the defendant landing in the criminal justice system and determine if they make good candidates for resolutions that prioritize rehabilitation and resources rather than incarceration.

Among those options is the District Attorney's Behavioral Health Adult Diversion (BHAD) program, which launched in 2021. Diversion is an alternative to traditional criminal justice paths that provides a way out of the system, without a conviction, for lower-level crimes where someone adequately addresses their behavior. In May 2023, a 70-year-old male was referred to BHAD following an arrest for harassing a store employee. It was determined that he was experiencing a significant mental health crisis at the time of the incident. He entered BHAD and engaged in mental health treatment for six months through our partners at SummitStone. He successfully completed the treatment and has remained law-abiding ever since. Overall, the BHAD success rate for 2023 was 87%.

The 8th Judicial District also offers several Problem-Solving Courts, including a Wellness Court designed for defendants with severe and persistent mental health needs that require more intensive supervision. The collaborative team includes a judge, court staff, mental health professionals, and a deputy district attorney, who work to closely supervise defendants, ensuring they meet stringent treatment requirements and are connected with community resources to ensure they remain contributing members of the community long after any sentence expires. In 2023, the Wellness Court served 52 defendants and has achieved far better case outcomes than when those same high-needs defendants are placed on standard probation or incarcerated.

We also launched a docket devoted to defendants undergoing court-ordered competency proceedings. It is a transformational model that connects defendants in the restoration process with local resources while the state mental health hospital faces debilitating backlogs. Finding local solutions to complex statewide problems has benefited the efficient and equitable administration of justice.

Larimer County also has a growing network of resources outside of the justice system which aid in reducing and preventing crime. The new Larimer County Behavioral Health Services at Longview Campus is a terrific example of the collaboration needed to solve complex problems like mental health crises and addiction. Since opening in December of 2023, the facility has already been utilized extensively. As their capacity opens to wider use by the justice system, we will see benefits that reverberate throughout community.

To continue this important discussion on mental health, inform the public about our work, and hear from you about mental health priorities, I will be hosting the third in a series of Coffee Conversations. This month's conversation will take place at Starry Night in Fort Collins, on May 30th at 9:00 AM. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Gordon McLaughlin
District Attorney



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