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**Bexar County Awarded Grant Funding
to Assist Indigent Defendants With Mental Health Conditions**

On October 1, 2021, the Bexar County Commissioners Court created a Managed Assigned Counsel Office (BCMACO) to improve representation and outcomes for criminal defendants, who otherwise may not be able to afford their own legal representation. To further improve the newly created office, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) awarded funds from a mental health defenders improvement grant in their session on June 9, 2022. The award is valued at a total of \$1.1 million over the course of six years.

The grant will be used to assist in funding a new mental health division within the BCMACO to improve the quality of representation for indigent defendants (adult and juveniles) with mental health diagnoses and needs. This grant will benefit all statutory county and district courts hearing criminal matters punishable by incarceration or juvenile matters in the county.

Bexar County has been a leader in its investment to enhance the quality of life for those living with mental illness with programs like Haven for Hope and The San Antonio Fear Free Environment to name just a couple. The judiciary too has shown its commitment by establishing special mental health dockets with pretrial diversion programs. This program will build on previous efforts by matching a qualified private panel attorney with a social worker or mental health case manager who has the necessary competencies to achieve favorable outcomes for his/her client living with mental illness.

Bexar County Precinct 2 Commissioner Justin Rodriguez said he is “excited to see how yet another building block is added to create equal representation within the criminal justice system for all Bexar County residents regardless of their background or financial means.”

Bexar County District Judge Ron Rangel added, “I’m pleased with the award of this grant as approximately one-third of those arrested in our county undergo a mental health evaluation during the intake process. Our society can no longer afford to ignore mental health issues within the criminal justice system. Our goals should always include keeping our community safe, preventing arrestees from reoffending, and continuing to work to solve these issues.”

Like most counties, a substantial percentage of Bexar County’s criminal cases involve mental health issues. The money will fund positions for one attorney, one social worker, and one case manager.

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