



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**District of Columbia Advisory Committee to the  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:  
*(Mental Health, Mental Health Courts and the Criminal Legal System)***

The District of Columbia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report on the intersection of mental health and criminal legal system and evaluated the effectiveness of the District of Columbia Superior Court Mental Health Community Court (DCMHCC). The report (<https://www.usccr.gov/files/2020-09-21-Mental-Health-in-DC.pdf>) is based on a briefing record that included testimony from mental health court experts and various DC stakeholders—two of whom were graduates of the DCMHCC Program. The day-long, in-person briefing was held in Washington, D.C. on November 7, 2019.

Overall, the DC Mental Health Community Court Program has helped to reduce the recidivism rates and provide treatment and other services to individuals with severe mental illness who become involved in the District's criminal justice system. In many ways, the DCMHCC seems to be at the top of the class among mental health court programs that deal with individuals who suffer from a severe mental illness and commit criminal offenses.

Clearly additional community-based care providers and housing would greatly assist those suffering from severe mental illness and might prevent many of them from becoming justice-involved in the first place. Similarly, additional police training and resources can assist in helping those suffering from a mental illness receive community-based treatment and which will, hopefully, reduce recidivism rates among offenders with mental illness. Programs such as the Metropolitan Police Department's Pre-Arrest Diversion Program should be encouraged and adequately funded.

In announcing the publication of the Committee's report, Committee Chair John G. Malcolm said:

I applaud the DC Committee members for examining this most important topic and issuing this report. Unfortunately, because of inadequate resources in the community, many individuals with severe mental illnesses end up becoming justice-involved, not to mention being particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of crime themselves. Although further study is clearly warranted, the DC Mental Health Community Court Program is a well-run, compassionate program that connects program participants with much-needed services. The program shows every promise of improving the lives of those who participate and of enhancing public safety by reducing recidivism rates.

The Committee's examination highlighted the following recommendations:

1. Encourage continued funding and operation of the DCMHCC and suggest that it or an interested academic institution create a long-term tracking system of the graduates. Periodically measuring their status (e.g., following the 1st, 2nd, and 5th years) after completing the program—tracking both static factors (e.g., age, race, sex, etc.) and dynamic factors (e.g., residence status, substance use, etc.), if possible.
2. Urge the U.S. Attorney's Office to consult with prosecutors in other districts about their experiences with mental health courts and review annually the eligibility criteria for expanded participation in the DCMHCC Program. This may be particularly appropriate now because of the added risk of infection by the coronavirus pandemic to those who are incarcerated.
3. Encourage community-based care programs to promote long-term goals for housing, education, counseling, and employment services to those with serious mental illnesses, including individuals who have recently been released from, or otherwise involved in, the criminal legal system.
4. Urge the DCMHCC, along with the Department of Behavioral Health, to devise standards for assessing the quality of care from service providers to program participants and develop schedules for conducting such assessments.
5. Urge the DCMHCC to examine the standards it uses, comparing them with the "essential" standards recommended for use by the Council of State Governments and a report to the public any discrepancies.

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights issues. It is the only federal department, agency or commission with a network of 51 statutorily mandated federal advisory committees, in each state and the District of Columbia, that study civil rights issues in their states and report the results of their reviews to the Commission. For more information about the Commission, and the Delaware Advisory Committee, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*