Administrative Office of the Courts

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Supreme Court creates statewide judicial commission on mental health

SANTA FE – The state Supreme Court announced today the creation of a permanent commission to improve how the justice system responds to people experiencing mental health related issues.

The New Mexico Commission on Mental Health and Competency will include representatives of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, tribal governments, advocates for behavioral health services and housing, those with a life experience in mental health issues, and criminal justice system partners – law enforcement, prosecutors and defense counsel.

"The commission will develop a roadmap for New Mexico to better meet the behavioral health needs of adults and juveniles who come into contact with our state judicial system," said Justice Briana Zamora, who will serve as the Court's liaison to the commission.

Chief Justice Michael Vigil said, "The commission can foster a collaborative response in our courts and communities to effectively and fairly respond to those with mental health issues."

The commission will have a broad range of responsibilities, including reviewing policies and procedures concerning a person's competency to stand trial and considering how to better identify people in need of mental health treatment before they enter the justice system. The commission also is to explore ways of expanding the behavioral health resources available in communities and courts statewide, particularly in underserved communities and rural areas.

In an April 8 order, the Court stated that the commission's "objectives shall be to promote fair treatment of affected individuals, to improve public safety through appropriate and meaningful behavioral health interventions, and to provide proper education and training to judges, lawyers, court staff and cross-system partners at the intersection of behavioral health and criminal justice."

The Court will appoint the commission's 17 voting members and is encouraging participation by other groups and governmental organizations as ex-officio members, including the New Mexico

chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Human Services Department's Behavioral Health Services Division, the Children, Youth and Families Department's Behavioral Health Division, the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute, the Department of Corrections, Indian Affairs Department, Department of Veterans Services and New Mexico Association of Counties.

The Court is seeking applicants for the commission. Applicants should send a letter of interest to Supreme Court Chief Clerk Elizabeth Garcia by email to nmsupremecourtclerk@nmcourts.gov, by fax to (505) 827-4837 or by first class mail to P.O. Box 848, Santa Fe, NM 87504. Applicants should limit their letters to two pages, indicate which position they are seeking and describe (1) why they wish to serve on the commission, (2) what they bring to the commission and (3) their professional experience with mental health and competency issues. Letters of interest should be submitted no later than 5 p.m. on May 27.

The Court has several permanent commissions working on justice system issues, including the Commission on Access to Justice and the Children's Court Improvement Commission.

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Justice Briana Zamora

Chief Justice Michael Vigil