

17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
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Broward Felony Drug Court Earns Prestigious National 'Mentor' Court Status

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. – The 17th Judicial Circuit's Adult Felony Pre-Trial Drug Court has been named one of only 10 "mentor" courts in the nation stemming from its compassionate approach to assisting Broward County residents with substance use disorders and providing treatment and educational services for their long-term success.

"It's a very big deal," said Circuit Judge Michael Davis, who presides over the problem-solving court. "There are over 4,000 recognized problem solving courts across the U.S. and only 10 are designated as 'mentor' courts. We are the only one in Florida."

The three-year designation was announced in December by [All Rise](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing national best practice standards to Problem Solving Courts across the nation. Broward's Felony Pre-Trial Drug Court was chosen from 100 applicants based on its innovation, engagement with the community and commitment to the justice process.

"They are absolutely one of the best courts in the country," said Vanessa Matthews, director of the All Rise Treatment Court Institute in Alexandria, VA. "This court has embodied what those principles are in the work they do as a mentor court, and the judge is beyond what we would ever expect a judge to do from the bench in his opportunities to provide people with avenues to succeed."

This therapeutic court is designed to assist people with substance use disorders so they can successfully enjoy a substance-free life through positive change and choices. Above all, treatment courts promote help and recovery for the most vulnerable.

Broward's Adult Felony Drug Court program is a standout among problem-solving courts because of its pro-active efforts to connect participants to services and move cases through the system quickly, which in turn saves lives by eliminating unnecessary delays in essential substance use treatments. This process also eliminates the need to spend money housing potential participants in jail.

Chief Judge Jack Tuter said the prestigious designation is a defining moment for the 17th Judicial Circuit.

"I am so very proud of the accomplishments of our drug court. For years the Court has assisted folks caught up in the awful effects of drug abuse. And this year the 17th Circuit was named one of the 10 mentor courts in the nation," Judge Tuter said. "It's a huge achievement."

Here's how drug court works: voluntary participants (usually charged with nonviolent criminal offenses which may or may not include a drug charge) are clinically assessed and agree to complete a substance use disorder treatment program built around an individualized case plan that includes random drug and alcohol testing. Substance use disorder treatment is ordered if necessary and frequent status hearings are held before the judge to monitor progress. Relapse prevention plans include learning how to change criminal thinking into critical thinking. During the process, participants report to the Dept. of Corrections.

"What I like to say to the participants is there is no shame in our game here in our drug court," Judge Davis said. "You can tell me anything and we will not judge you for it. If you tell us you have used Fentanyl, we will do our best to help you."

Successful completion from the program includes the dismissal of the charges, the retention of the individual's drivers license and the removal of impediments to employment, military service, living arrangements and public benefits.

Currently about 250 people are enrolled in the program, no surprise for an area that is ground zero for substances like Flakka, Fentanyl, bath salts, Ketamine and pink cocaine (Tusi), said Drug Court Manager Russell Edwards.

ABOUT THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

The Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida is the court for Broward County, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, FL. It is the second largest circuit court in the state. Broward County has 90 judges. Of those, 32 are county court judges and 58 are circuit judges. Four courthouses comprise the 17th circuit and include the Broward County Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale, and three satellite courthouses: the North Regional Courthouse in Deerfield Beach, the West Regional Courthouse in Plantation and the South Regional Courthouse in Hollywood.

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