

State Representative
CHARLES MCBURNEY
District 16



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Representative Charles McBurney Introduces Mental Health Bill for Criminal Justice System

A bill codifying and expanding mental health courts and implementing a pilot mental health hospital diversion program which would include Duval County was filed today in the Florida House of Representatives by Representative Charles McBurney (Dist. 16-R).

The bill:

- Allows counties to create and fund treatment-based mental health court programs;
- Allows judges to require offenders to participate in post-adjudicatory based mental health court programs if certain eligibility requirements are met;
- Allows judges to require qualifying veterans to participate in treatment programs as part of their probation or community control;
- Expands the definition of veteran, for the purpose of participation in veterans' court, to include those discharged or released under a general discharge;
- Permits a defendant with a mental illness who meets qualifying criteria to participate in pretrial mental health court program;
- Creates a Forensic Hospital Diversion Pilot Program in Dade, Broward and Duval Counties; and
- Allows a juvenile offender with a mental illness to be admitted to a delinquency pretrial program for treatment purposes and allows a judge to dismiss charges against the juvenile upon the juvenile's successful completion of the program.

"Jails and prisons are the largest psychiatric facility in Florida," said Representative McBurney. "There are nearly 18 times as many people with mental illness in our jails and prisons as there are in our state psychiatric hospitals combined."

"It is not enough to deal with the results and costs of untreated mental illness in our criminal justice system," said Representative McBurney, who is also chair of the House Judiciary Committee, "We have to take action now to improve public safety and deal with the underlying causes of the illness."

Last year similar legislation passed the Florida House 113-1, but died in the last days of session in the Florida Senate.

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