



Tacoma Municipal Therapeutic Courts

City Council Study Session
Tuesday April 22, 2025



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●●● Agenda



- Introductions
- Review of Tacoma Municipal Mental Health Court and Community Court
- Overview of 2023-2024 Therapeutic Court Data
- Q&A

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Introductions



Judge Drew Henke

- Elected 2015
- Presiding Judge 2019-2024
- Has presided over the Mental Health Calendar since 2019
- Established formal Mental Health Court June 2023

Judge Dee Sonntag

- Elected 2022
- Assistant Presiding Judge since 2025
- Therapeutic Court experience working as a defense attorney in the Pierce County Superior Court Felony Drug Court Program
- Launched Tacoma Community Court in October 2023

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Therapeutic Court Team



Therapeutic Court Staff:

- Case Managers:
Elidia Colmenares and Hannah Olver
- Coordinator: Emily Splinter-Felton
- Court Operations Supervisor: Andrea Currin
- Defense Attorney: Kate McCracken
- Prosecutors: Jagbir Atwal and Matt Dixon

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●●● Revisiting: What are Therapeutic Courts?



- While all courts aim to reduce criminal behavior, Therapeutic Courts take a unique approach to target the root cause that led to an individual's offense
- Therapeutic Courts connect participants with treatment services and community resources instead of traditional sentencing, such as jail or fines
- Designed to feel welcoming, approachable, and supportive
- Every participant is assigned a case manager to help them identify personal goals and connect with local services to help them achieve those goals
- Criminal charges are dismissed upon successful completion of the program

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●●● Mental Health Court Overview



- Launched June 2023. Designed for individuals with a serious and persistent mental health diagnosis
- Participants enter a 12-month Stipulated Order of Continuance (SOC)
- Participants are directed into one of two tracks: Track A (low-risk) or Track B (high-risk) based on the outcome of a risk and needs assessment completed during the referral process

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Community Court Overview



- Launched October 2023
- Eligible participants enter a three, six, or nine-month Stipulated Order of Continuance (SOC) depending on the severity of their charge
- Community Court is held outside of the courthouse in a neutral, welcoming space. Recently moved to the Downtown Public Library in February 2025
- Community Court hearings are facilitated with all team members (judge, attorneys, case managers, clients) all seated on one-level at the same table

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Therapeutic Court Funding



- Therapeutic Court staffing (2 FTEs) and operation costs have been paid by state grants since 2022
- State support for Therapeutic Courts is expected to continue in the next state biennium; however, funding cuts are expected
- Tacoma Municipal Court was recently awarded a federal grant to fund an additional 0.5 FTE and a research project with UWT to conduct a local validation of our risk and need assessment tool


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2023-2024 Therapeutic Court Data

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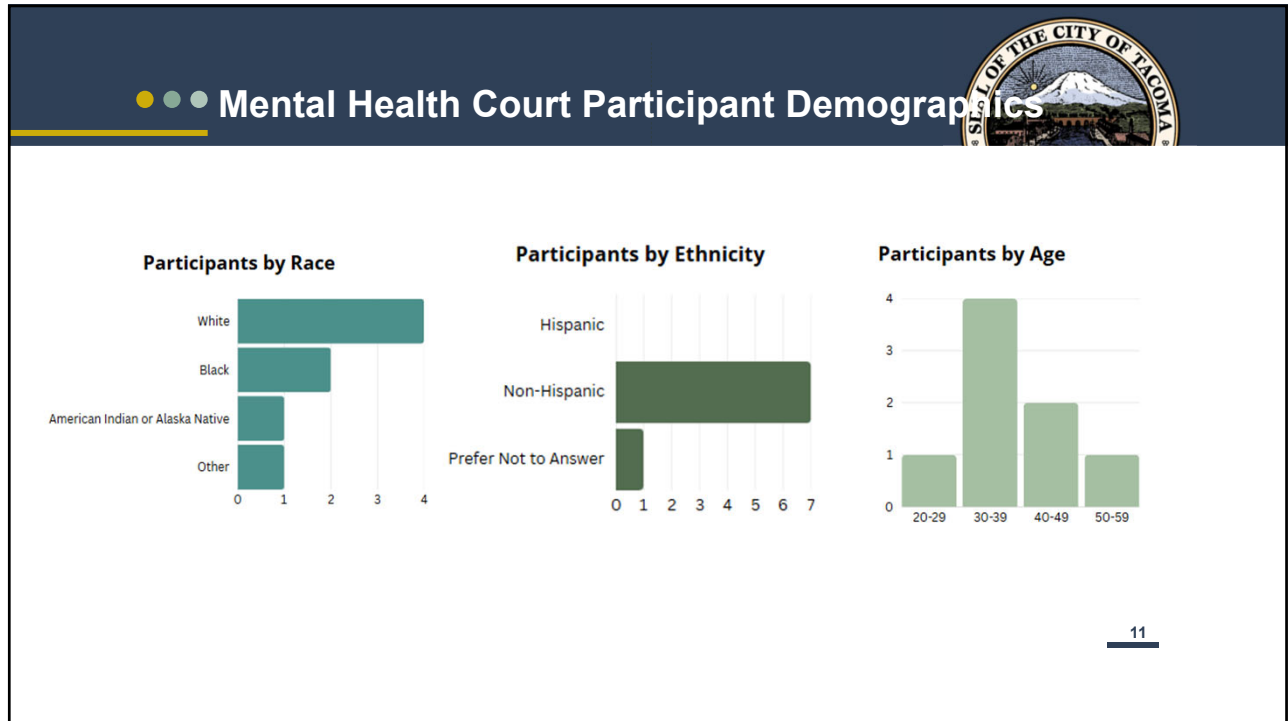
Mental Health Court

Mental Health Court Case Count

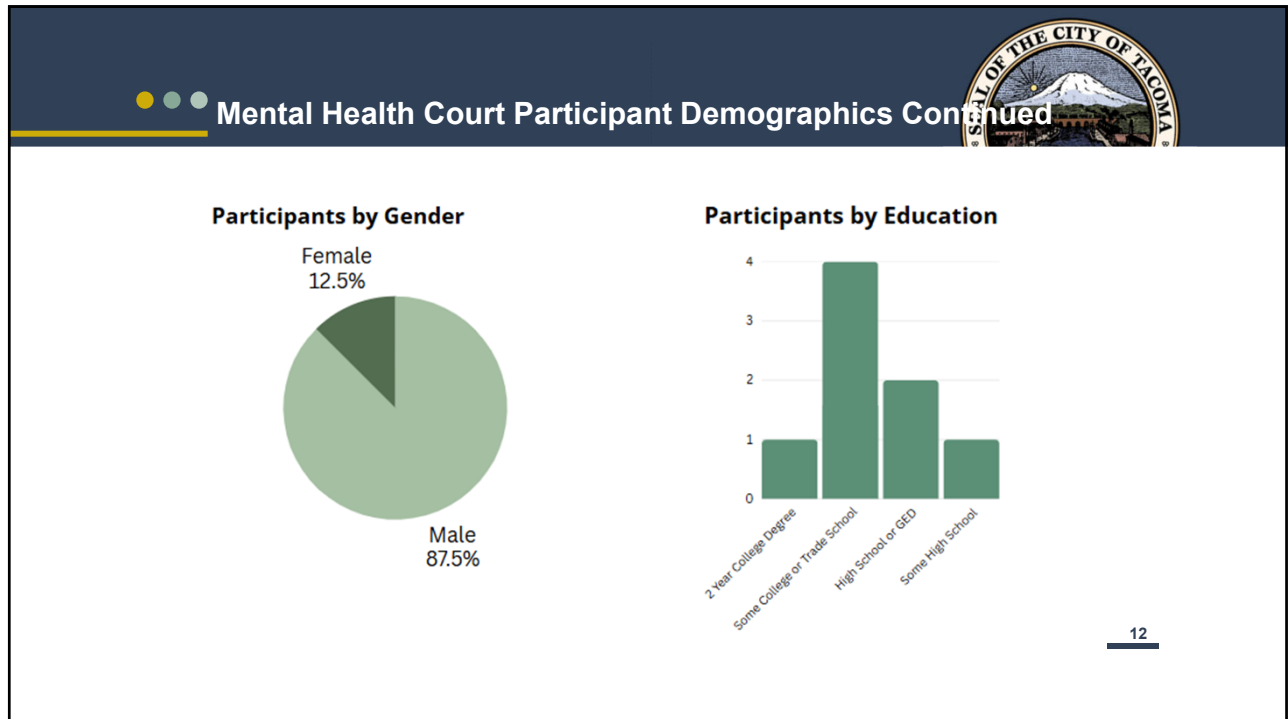
June 2023-December 2024

- Referrals: 25
- Declined Cases: 12
- Entries: 8
- Graduations: 2
- Other Terminations: 0

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Charges Entered in Mental Health Court



Charge	Quantity
Protection Order Violation	7
Assault 4	5
Destruction of Property	3
Harassment	1
Malicious Mischief 3	1
Theft 3	1

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Mental Health Court Initial Outcome Data



- 100% of Mental Health Court Graduates have had no new charges or convictions since exiting the program
- 25% of Mental Health Court Participants incurred new charges while participating in the program. The outcomes of those new charges are:
 - 40% were dismissed
 - 60% were added into the client's Mental Health Court agreement

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Mental Health Court Participant Feedback



Of Mental Health Court graduates who exited the program in 2024:

- 100% report feeling that they were treated fairly in Mental Health Court
- 100% plan to continue working the treatment providers and other community resources they received during the program

What did you like about Mental Health Court?

"The help with housing and a job."

"They [the Mental Health Court team] weren't there to judge me. They were just there to help me move to the next step in life. It was really motivating."

In what ways could Mental Health Court be improved?

"Connect people with more agencies and resources sooner. When I got out of jail, there was nothing."

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Community Court



Community Court Case Count

October 2023-December 2024

Referrals: 155

Declined Cases: 56

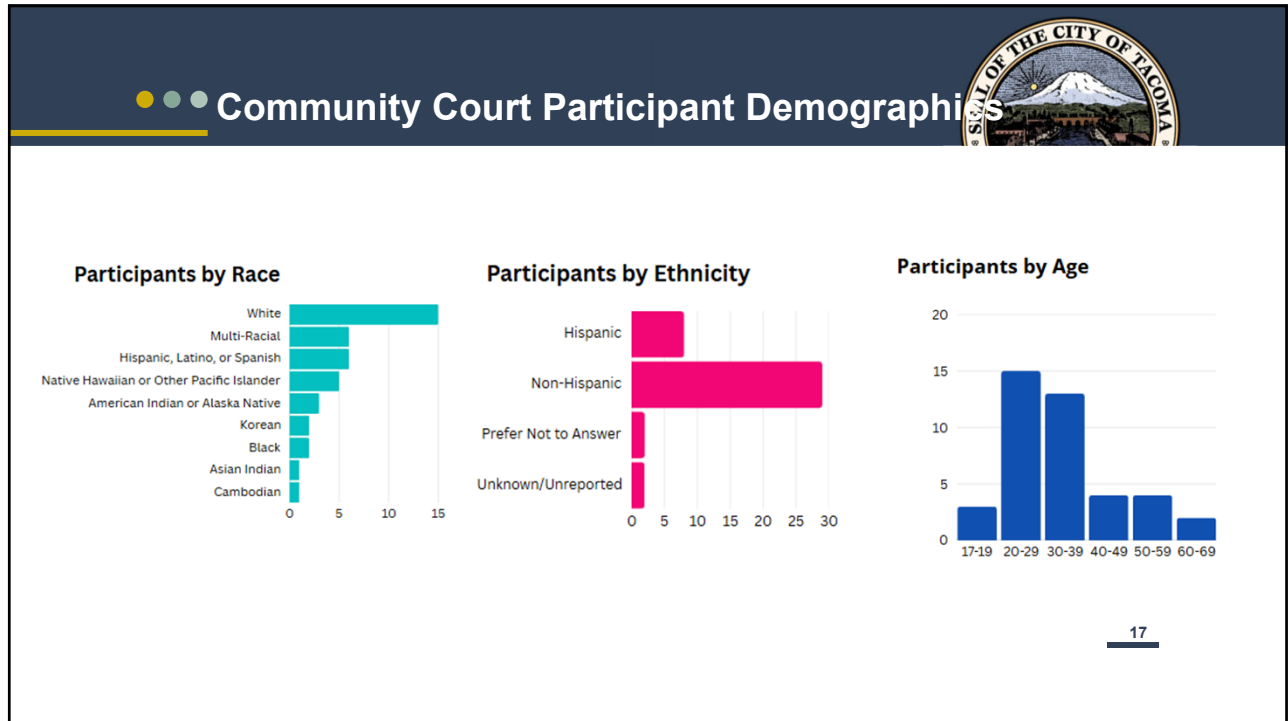
Entries: 41

Graduations: 13

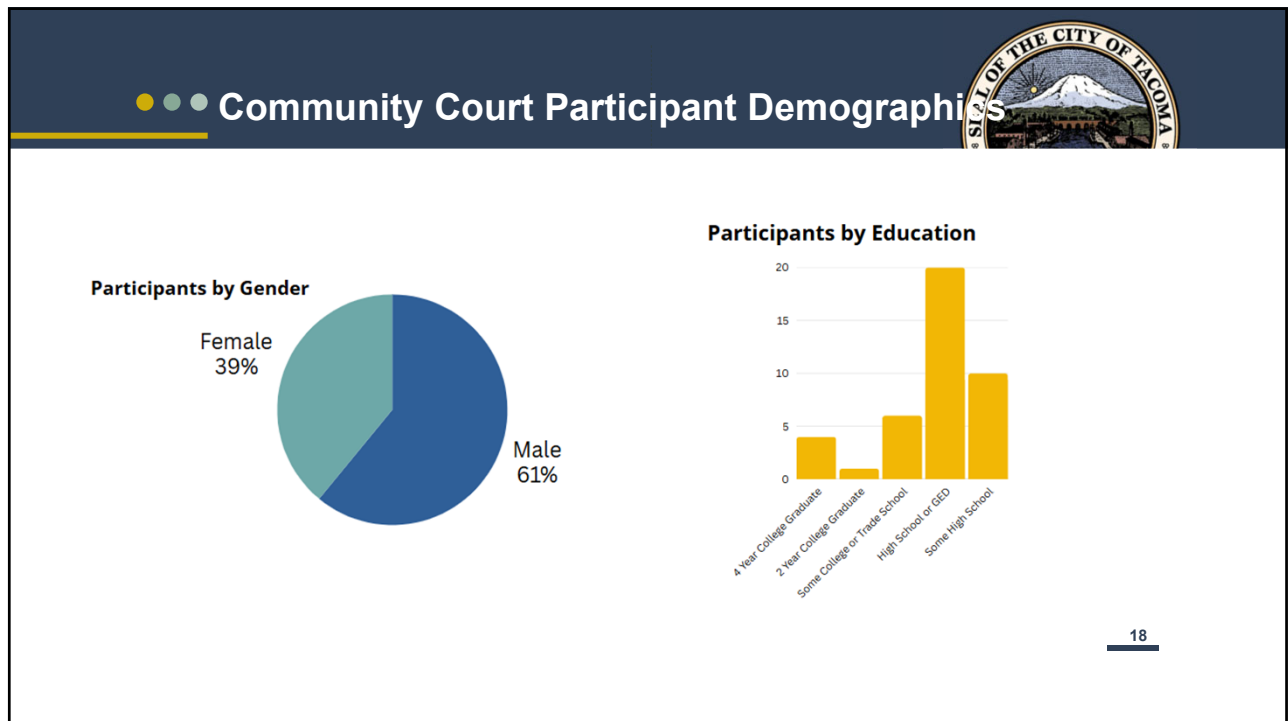
Other Terminations: 1

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Charges Entered in Community Court



Assault 4- 8	Animal Injuring Humans/Animals- 1	Unlawful Exhibition of Speed- 1
Supplying Liquor to a Minor- 5	Criminal Trespass- 1	Unlawful Exhibition of Speed Attendance-1
Reckless Driving- 5	Driving w/ License Suspended 1- 1	Controlled Substance Possession-1
Protection Order Violation- 4	Driving w/ License Suspended 2- 1	Criminal Mistreatment- 1
Destruction of Property- 3	Driving w/ License Suspended 3- 1	Failure to Stop or Obey Law Enforcement- 1
Malicious Mischief- 3	Fighting in a Public Place- 1	Hit and Run Accident Injury/Attempt- 1
Harassment- 2	Hit and Run Unattended- 1	Resist Arrest/Aid Arrested Person- 1
Theft 3- 2	Loitering for Drug Activity- 1	
Obstruction- 3	Public Disturbance- 1	
Reckless Endangerment- 2	Sell/Make/Buy/Possess Weapon- 1	
Vehicle Prowling- 2	Serve/Allow Minor on Premises- 1	

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Community Court Initial Outcome Data



- 92% of Community Court graduates had no new charges or convictions since exiting the program
- 20% of Community Court Participants incurred new charges while participating in the program. The outcome of those new charges are as follows:
 - 36% were dismissed
 - 29% remain in pending status
 - 21% resulted in a conviction
 - 7% were added to the client's Community Court agreement
 - 7% entered in a deferral agreement through traditional court

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Community Court Participant Feedback



Of Community Court graduates who exited the program in 2024:

- 100% report feeling that they were treated fairly in Community Court
- 40% plan to continue working with the treatment providers and other community resources they received during the program. 50% felt this question was not applicable to them as they did not require treatment services while participating in Community Court.

What did you like about Community Court?

"The team is so welcoming and the environment is so calm. I came to court feeling very nervous, but here I don't feel afraid."

"I was always comfortable. [Community Court] gave me a lot of support without judgement. I felt like I could be myself. Anytime I called, the phone was always answered. My questions were always answered."

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Community Court Participant Feedback Continue



What did you like about Community Court?

"It took something that could have brought me down and instead gave me purpose. It took away the fear of the court system. [Community Court] provided a lot of accountability, but at the same time I could tell it was important to the team to see me grow."

In what ways could Community Court be improved?

"Scheduling. It would be nice to have more days/times Community Court was offered so I could find a time that didn't conflict with my work schedule."

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● ● ● Data Limitations



When reviewing the data from the first year of the Therapeutic Court program, it's important to note:

- Sample size is still small (particularly for Mental Health Court)
- Currently no control group for comparison
- Evidence of program efficacy will take time
- We expect discover more trends in participant engagement and outcomes as the program grows

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● ● ● Opportunities to Support Therapeutic Courts



- Share opportunities for collaboration with other city programs
- City funding may be needed if state and federal funding is discontinued
- Come visit!

Mental Health Court: Wednesdays 10:30 in Courtroom 234

Community Court: Thursdays 1:30pm at
Downtown Public Library
1102 Tacoma Ave S
Tacoma, WA 98402

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Questions?

For any future questions/concerns, please contact:
Therapeutic Court Coordinator: (253) 591-5229
TMTC@cityoftacoma.org