

Lancaster County Court of  
Common Pleas  
Office of Adult Probation and  
Parole Services  
Contact: William O'Connell

40 East King Street  
Lancaster, PA 17608-3480  
Phone 717-735-2196  
[oconnelw@co.lancaster.pa.us](mailto:oconnelw@co.lancaster.pa.us)

# Media Advisory

## Lancaster Common Pleas Court Expands Mental Health Court Program

**Lancaster, PA, June 26, 2012**— Judge Margaret C. Miller, presiding judge of the Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas Adult Mental Health Court, announced today that the program was recently expanded to allow a diversionary (pre-trial) track of cases, meaning charges approved by the District Attorney could be accepted into Mental Health Court with the possibility of the charges being reduced or dismissed if the defendant successfully completes Mental Health Court supervision. The announcement was made today at a graduation ceremony for two Mental Health Court participants. Until the addition of the diversionary track, charges accepted into Mental Health Court required an unconditional guilty plea by the defendant, without the possibility of mitigating or expunging the charges. The change puts Mental Health Court on a par with the Court's two other treatment courts, Drug Court and Veterans Court, which also have diversionary tracks. Miller said, "We appreciate the confidence the DA has shown us by allowing Mental Health Court the possibility of a diversionary track. The knowledge that criminal charges may be reduced or withdrawn is a tremendous incentive to comply with treatment and supervision."

The other program change announced by Miller today is the court's admission of participants who are not accepted for case management services by the County's Office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Early Intervention. This will allow otherwise eligible offenders who meet the program's diagnostic requirement of serious mental illness, and whose charges are approved for Mental Health Court by the District Attorney, to benefit from the intensive supervision and community program supports that assist program participants in complying with treatment and supervision requirements. Before the change was instituted, Mental Health Court participants had to qualify for and be accepted for services by the County MH/MR/EI office. "The legal community has given very positive feedback to this change," Miller said, "because it makes a broader range of individuals

potentially eligible for the program and focuses on Mental Health Court's core mission – to reduce recidivism among mentally ill offenders.”

The graduation ceremony, held today in the ceremonial courtroom of the Lancaster County Courthouse, was the second for the program, whose first two participants graduated in March of this year.