



- **Statewide Mental Health Summit:** The commission hosted a statewide Mental Health Summit in 2023 that was believed to be the first of its kind. The event brought together court partners, legal professionals and community leaders to strengthen responses to those impacted by mental illness, substance use and intellectual or developmental disabilities. The event provided opportunities to share ideas, build partnerships and explore best practices for creating a comprehensive, community-focused continuum of care for Kentucky’s justice system.
- **Recovery-Oriented System of Care Summits:** These regional summits in 2024 featured presentations from mental health experts. The sessions provided training and opportunities for participants to engage in meaningful conversations on how the court system connects communities and families with behavioral health services.
- **KJCMH Training Series:** This free training series is designed to help courts, communities and professionals better support people with behavioral health needs and disabilities. Open to everyone, the short modules promote awareness, collaboration and effective responses to build a fairer and more compassionate justice system.
- **Seth’s Law:** House Bill 385 became law in 2024 and was designed to improve mental health and competency

proceedings in the state’s court system. It was named in honor of Seth Stevens, a KJCMH staff attorney who tragically died by suicide. The law decreases the number of people needing to be placed under state guardianship to access mental health care and addresses significant delays in criminal trials by streamlining the competency evaluation processes. Seth’s Law represents a monumental shift in the court system’s approach to mental health. By introducing outpatient evaluations and allowing trusted friends to make medical decisions, the law ensures more efficient, humane and personalized care for those with mental health issues.

- **Parental Rights Legislation:** Senate Bill 26 became law in 2025 and is a major step toward protecting the rights of parents and caregivers with disabilities. The bipartisan legislation ensures that disability alone can never be used as a reason to deny custody, adoption or parenting rights. SB 26 strengthens Kentucky’s commitment to family unity, fairness and inclusion – affirming that all families deserve the chance to thrive with the right support in place.



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**Kentucky Judicial Commission on**  
**MENTAL HEALTH**

*Working together to improve  
 justice outcomes for Kentuckians  
 with mental health, substance use  
 disorders and intellectual and  
 developmental disabilities*



# Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health



The Kentucky Judicial Commission on Mental Health is a statewide, multidisciplinary body established by the Supreme Court of Kentucky in 2022. The commission is leading transformative improvements in how the justice system addresses people whose mental health issues, substance use disorders and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have contributed to their engaging in criminal activity.

Grounded in a long-term vision for systemic reform, the commission identifies, recommends and implements strategies that promote fairness, access and coordinated care across all points of justice system involvement.

Commission members are stakeholders representing the judicial and legal communities; juvenile, criminal, and child protection systems; the legislature; the business community; organizations with a substantial interest in mental health matters; and other state and local leaders who have demonstrated a

commitment to mental health issues affecting Kentuckians. Through collaboration, the commission works to enhance the quality, consistency and timeliness of court responses for Kentuckians with behavioral health challenges.

By aligning its work with the values of justice and compassion, the commission seeks to build a justice system that supports healing, prioritizes prevention and diversion and ensures no one is left behind due to unmet behavioral health needs.

## KJCMH Efforts:

- **Education/Training:** Delivering specialized training to judges, court staff, attorneys and justice partners on mental health, trauma and treatment-informed practices.
- **Policy/Legislative Review:** Supporting laws and reforms that promote diversion, access to treatment and protections for vulnerable populations.
- **System Coordination:** Fostering collaboration between courts, behavioral health, law enforcement and community partners to improve outcomes.
- **Community Engagement:** Focusing on lived experience and community voices for developing reforms. The commission does this through town halls, listening sessions and forums. It supports judicially led, solution-focused collaboration that identifies gaps, removes barriers and strengthens local systems of care through community mapping.

## Key Initiatives

- ▶ **Expansion of Mental Health Court:** Mental Health Court, structured similarly to Drug Court, is for defendants identified as high risk and high need who have been charged with a misdemeanor or felony and diagnosed with a serious mental illness or co-occurring disorder. Participants who complete the approximately two-year program may have

their charges dismissed through diversion or be granted conditional discharge through probation.

- ▶ **Establishment of Behavioral Health Liaisons:** To support court efforts in fostering a recovery-oriented system of care, the commission recommended the creation of behavioral health liaison positions across the judicial system. BHLs provide guidance and navigation services for people participating in court programming and those at risk of entering the justice system. BHLs serve as critical connectors across all court programs and dockets (Criminal, Civil, Family and Juvenile) by linking courts with community-based behavioral health resources. BHLs help ensure people receive timely access to treatment and support, promoting diversion where appropriate and reducing system involvement.
- ▶ **Mapping:** Kentucky has undertaken comprehensive mapping of its criminal justice, child welfare and juvenile justice systems to identify gaps, strengthen services and improve outcomes. This coordinated approach supports community-driven reform by aligning resources and partners across systems.
  - **Statewide Sequential Intercept Model Mapping** – A 2023 mapping workshop identified five key priorities: empowering courts, expanding training, using data, strengthening behavioral health supports and centering lived experience. Recommendations focused on diversion, access to care and reducing justice involvement.
  - **Statewide Child Welfare Mapping** – Using the Upstream Model, efforts focused on prevention, early intervention and collaboration to strengthen families and reduce maltreatment.
  - **Statewide Juvenile Justice Mapping** – This initiative emphasized prevention, school engagement and reentry support to reduce youth justice involvement.
  - **Community Mapping** – A blended model developed with the National Center for State Courts allows local communities to address all three systems together, revealing service gaps and promoting coordinated solutions.