

Local Court Receives State Certification

The Substance Abuse and Mental Illness Docket (SAMI) of the Butler County Court of Common Pleas – General Division has earned final certification from the Ohio Supreme Court’s Commission on Specialized Dockets.

In order to receive the certification, the local court had to submit an application, undergo a site visit, and provide specific program materials in response to certification standards.

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor congratulated the SAMI Docket and Judge J. Gregory Howard for receiving final certification.

“Specialized dockets divert offenders toward criminal justice initiatives that employ tools and tailored services to treat and rehabilitate the offender so they can become productive members of society,” said Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor. “Studies have shown this approach works by reducing recidivism while saving tax dollars.”

Specialized dockets are courts that are dedicated to specific types of offenses or offenders and use a combination of different techniques for holding offenders accountable while also addressing the underlying causes of their behavior. There are more than 210 specialized dockets in Ohio that deal with issues such as drugs and alcohol, mental health, domestic violence and human trafficking.

The standards provide a minimum level of uniform practices for specialized dockets throughout Ohio, and allow local courts to innovate and tailor to meet their community’s needs and resources.

Judge Howard is honored to receive final certification of the Court’s SAMI Docket. He stated: “The certification of the SAMI Court by the Ohio Supreme Court is a testament to everyone involved with our court, including the court staff, the probation department, the social workers, the counselors, the doctors and all of the agencies that provide assistance to the individuals involved in the SAMI Court program. All of them are committed to helping each of the participants achieve their goal of living a clean and sober, law-abiding lifestyle while maintaining stable mental health. My part as the judge is a very small part of the process. The real work is done by those acknowledged above and the effort of the individuals who have agreed to participate in the program as part of their community control. It is an honor and a privilege to preside over this specialized docket and to continue with the work started by judges that preceded me, Judge Michael Sage and Judge Noah Powers.”

The certification requirements include establishing eligibility requirements, evaluating effectiveness of the specialized docket, and assembling a treatment team for implementing daily operations of the specialized docket. The team can include licensed treatment providers, law enforcement, court personnel, and is headed by the specialized docket judge.