

Judge: Mental health court needs new money

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Absent an infusion of new money, Ramsey County Mental Health Court — one of three mental health courts currently operating across the state — will be have to be shuttered come late summer.

“There is really a dire need for funding,” Ramsey County District Court Judge William Leary said at a legislative hearing on Tuesday. “We have no dedicated funding from the state courts and we have no funding from the county. All our funding comes from the Department of Human Services and two federal grants.”

Appearing before the House Public Safety Crime Prevention Policy and Finance Committee, Leary told

lawmakers that the DHS grant will run out “in the middle of the year” and a key federal grant — which provides funding for the court’s felony level cases — will expire in September.

Leary noted that there is considerable variation in the success rates of specialty courts, remarking: “There’s a saying: If you’ve seen one specialty



William Leary

court, then you’ve seen one specialty court.”

“But I believe our problem solving courts use the money in a very cost effective way,” he said, pointing to the dramatic reductions in recidivism and incarceration rates among program graduates.

Assistant Ramsey County Attorney Kim Bingham, who oversees Ramsey County’s mental health court as well as the 2nd District’s other problem-solving courts (DWI court, adult drug court, juvenile drug court, and veterans court), told lawmakers that the success is predicated on developing screening tools to “allow us to identify appropriate high-risk clients.”

“We need a vetted evaluation so we just don’t go with our gut. That approach has not always served us well,” she said. “These are not easy programs.”

House members on the panel reacted favorably to the presentations from Leary and Bingham, who were testifying in support of a proposal to allocate \$1 million from the general fund over the next two years to help foster the expansion of specialty courts across the state.

The legislation, chief-authored by Rep. Marion O’Neill, R-Buffalo, has bipartisan support. A companion bill has also been introduced in the Senate, where it awaits action in the Judiciary Committee.

Court News

Opening on Minnesota Client Security Board

One lawyer member is being sought to fill a vacancy commencing July 1, 2015, on the seven-member Client Security Board. The all-volunteer board is made up of five attorneys and two public members. The board oversees the administration of the Client Security Fund which was established in 1987 by the Minnesota Supreme Court. The board undertakes investigation of claims, coordinating with the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility.

The board reviews claims for compensation and makes final determinations on disbursement from the fund. The board also establishes a budget annually, enforces subrogation and lien rights of the fund, may sue in the name of the fund for restitution of payments made pursuant to claims, certifies the financial condition of the fund, makes recommendation to the Supreme Court regarding payment limits, and also makes

recommendation to the Supreme Court regarding rule changes.

The board meets about four times per year to consider claims filed by individuals who have suffered a loss of funds due to their attorney’s dishonest conduct.

Familiarity with the professional responsibility system in Minnesota is desirable but not mandatory. Appointment will be for a three-year term; no member may serve

more than two three-year terms. The Minnesota Supreme Court will make the appointment.

Compensation is limited to reimbursement for costs. Submit letters of interest and curriculum vitae so as to be received by 4:30 pm on March 31, 2015, to AnnMarie O’Neill, Clerk of Appellate Courts, 25 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., St. Paul, MN, 55155 or annmarie.o'neill@courts.state.mn.us