Today District Attorney Devon Anderson will participate in the first Harris County Felony Mental Health Court graduation. The specialty court program offers intensive treatment, goals, and supervision to mentally ill defendants instead of jail time.

First Class Set to Graduate from Mental Health Court

*3 Defendants graduate from intensive, specialized program*

The District Attorney’s Office works together with the Harris County District Court Administration, Public Defender’s Office, Probation Department, the Sheriff’s Department, the Clerk’s Office, and a network of community-based providers to enhance public safety and reduce recidivism by providing treatment to mentally ill defendants for at least 18 months, depending on the participant’s progress.

“Mental Health Court, similar to the other specialty courts, requires the defendants to accept accountability for the crimes they’ve committed,” said District Attorney Anderson. “At the same time, the offenders are receiving appropriate treatment and obtaining skills that allow them to remain law abiding citizens. Programs like this one enhance public safety and reduce crime in our community.”

The Harris County Mental Health Court is currently funded by the District Attorney’s Office. The court started screening defendants for court admission in March 2012. Defendants must meet a certain criteria to qualify to enter the program, which includes pleading guilty.

The 3 defendants who will graduate today have maintained their mental health through on-going treatment, have stable housing and are engaged in productive and pro-social activities. The defendants completed 18 months in court and all of the requirements of probation. Each of the graduates has developed an action plan, which outlines what they need to do to maintain their mental wellness and remain outside of the criminal justice system.

The mental health court team meets weekly to staff each of the cases before bringing the participant before the judge for their weekly court appearance . Participants must adhere to a judicially supervised Re-Entry Plan that is monitored by judicial staff, probation staff, clinicians and caseworkers. There are 65 defendants in the program.