

# **Luzerne County Specialty Court**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Specialty Court?**

The purpose of Luzerne County Specialty Court, like any other Mental Health Court/Specialty Court, is to link mentally offenders who would ordinarily be prison-bound to long-term community-based treatment. They rely on thorough mental health assessments, individualized treatment plans, and ongoing judicial monitoring to address both the mental health need of the offenders and public safety concerns of the community. The client monitoring is accomplished through a team approach including to comprehensive supervision, mental health counseling, medications treatment services, and immediate sanctions and incentives. Currently, there are over 160 mental health- specialty courts across the country, and more are being planned.”

### **What are the goals of Specialty Court?**

The goals are to assure that offenders with mental illness receive treatment as early as possible and to maximize their chances of becoming productive, law abiding citizens.

### **Can I be forced to participate in Specialty Court?**

No, participation is voluntary.

### **Who is Eligible for Specialty Court?**

- An offender who voluntarily expresses interest in the court.
- An offender who resides in Luzerne County.
- An offender with a documented diagnosis of mental illness, mental disability or dually diagnosed with a mental illness in conjunction with substance abuse but the primary diagnosis being mental illness.
- An offender who is motivated to comply with medication and Mental Health treatment and behavior requirements.
- An offender who is currently charged with committing a misdemeanor and/or felony in Luzerne County.
- Any ARD eligible offense, excluding DUI's.
- A client facing probation/parole revocation.

### **Who is not Eligible for Specialty Court?**

Ineligible charges include, homicide offenses, assault by prisoner, drug trafficking, crimes of a violent nature, sexual offenders and DUI offenses.

*(Aggravated assault, Arson, Burglary, and VUFA offenses may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.)*

### **What is expected of me in Specialty Court?**

To some extent your requirements are individualized based on a number of factors, including your offense and mental health treatment needs. However, the mandatory requirements include meeting with your probation/parole officer on a weekly basis, attending all appointments, and actively participating in your mental health treatment. Additionally, you will be required to appear initially weekly to specialty court for status updates. Failing to meet these requirements will result in immediate sanctions. As you successfully progress through program, the frequency of probation appointments and specialty court appearances will gradually decrease. The minimum length of time spent in Specialty Court 12 months but the average length of time is between 18 and 24 months based on your mental health stabilization and severity of your offense.

### **What is the benefit of Specialty Court?**

The benefit of specialty court is to stabilize and maintain your mental health, as well as to breaking the cycle of incarceration. With proper counseling and monitoring of your medication regimen, you can hopefully learn to live independently and without legal ramifications.

### **How do I apply for Specialty Court?**

If you meet the initial eligibility requirements outlined above, have your attorney, prison counselor, MH counselor, or caseworker complete the Court Referral Form located at [www.mhmr.luzerne.pa.us](http://www.mhmr.luzerne.pa.us) and fax it to the Specialty Court Probation Officer, Judy Knick, at (570) 822-7866.