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DANE COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE COUNCIL TO RECEIVE \$600,000 GRANT FOR COMMUNITY COURT

The Dane County Criminal Justice Council (CJC) recently submitted an application for a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance to establish a community court, and received notification last week that the County will be awarded the \$600,000 grant to move this important initiative forward.

“The Dane County CJC has been recognized nationally for using data to achieve criminal justice improvements. The Planning and Implementation grant will greatly assist us in our ongoing effort to improve in another key area – addressing racial inequities in the criminal justice system,” said Clerk of Courts Carlo Esqueda, Chair of the Criminal Justice Council.

An outgrowth of the successful Dane County Community Restorative Court (restorative justice response to low level offenses by 17-25 year olds) the Community Court Initiative will engage the Courts for offenses and clients not appropriate for the CRC caseload. It will include a community court, social service supports, AODA therapy, monitoring and sanctions (when necessary), procedural fairness and the community voice.

In addition to Dane County’s foundational experience with the Community Restorative Court, the county has been laying the groundwork for a community court for the past two years. In 2020, Dane County budgeted \$100,000 for a needs assessment, which was completed in 2021 by the Center for Court Innovation (CCI). <https://cjc.countyofdane.com/documents/CCI-Final-Report-DaneCounty-9.10.21-.pdf>

District Attorney Ismael Ozanne said “this grant follows key work that has been done since 2009, including a collaborative peer visit to New York to learn about community courts in 2015. I have been an ardent supporter of this initiative and I’m happy to see this moving forward.”

“As one of the members of the 2015 visit to community courts in NYC, I am excited by this opportunity. At the core a community court is about unique partnerships and engaging the community in problem-solving. Community Courts can create new relationships, both within the justice system and with community stakeholders,” said Dr. Alex Gee, President and Founder of Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership. “I applaud this long term effort and grant award.”

This initiative will not duplicate services for the eligible candidates for the Community Restorative Court, nor the Deferred Prosecution Unit or Drug Treatment Court, but rather take a data informed approach to addressing the root cause of the alleged crime.

“This grant builds on the restorative justice proposals in my 2023 budget,” said County Executive Joe Parisi. “The award, coupled with my proposals for a community court coordinator and new Department of Criminal Justice Reform, will allow the County to move effectively forward in criminal justice reform. I’m pleased the Dane County Criminal Justice Council is being recognized as a national leader, and look forward to taking the next step.”

This grant will allow Dane County to implement an effective alternative to traditional court for non-violent offenders. Partnering effectively with community and service providers will address root causes of inequity, thereby improving overall quality of life. The community court initiative will eventually be co-located with other service providers in an area identified in the planning process, using demographic and offense data.

Sheriff Calvin Barrett said, "I'm a strong proponent of any grant program that can reduce recidivism and improve community safety and racial equity. I look forward to working collaboratively on this."

A Community Court Initiative will deflect offenders from potential jail stays. Research indicates that "two days matter," and common sense backs up the research. Job loss, family instability, and housing issues can lead to prolonged jail stays.

"This grant will be incredibly helpful in achieving a couple of priorities of the County Board: establishment of a community court and improving racial equity in the justice system," noted Board Chair Patrick Miles. "Years of work by the CJC and Dane County stakeholders enabled us to successfully compete nationally for this grant. We look forward to continued stakeholder collaboration to improve the Dane County justice system."

The work will begin with a pilot phase with up to 60 cases heard in the first year. Dane County CJC and its racial disparities subcommittee will work with community members and national experts to increase the efficacy and outcomes of the community court with racial equity as a major goal.

Judge Hyland remarked, "Dane County judiciary embraces procedural fairness, which is a core tenet of community courts. We look forward to working together to find stronger links to AODA service, mental health services, housing and employment for those involved in criminal cases."

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The 13 member Dane County Criminal Justice Council is a collaborative body created in Dane County ordinance to collaborate and improve public safety, racial equity and data-driven decisions. For more information: cjc.countyofdane.com