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Contact: Joe Stinebaker
Communications Director
O) 713-274-4028
C) 713-503-2610
Joe.Stinebaker@cjo.hctx.net

NEWS RELEASE

CITY, COUNTY AND STATE OFFICIALS DEDICATE “JUDGE ED EMMETT MENTAL HEALTH DIVERSION CENTER” *New Facility Helps Ensure Treatment – Not Punishment - For Mentally Ill*

Law enforcement and health officials gathered this morning to dedicate Harris County’s “Judge Ed Emmett Mental Health Diversion Center,” the new home for a program that provides a badly needed alternative to jailing mentally ill people arrested for minor, non-violent offenses.

The Emmett Center, at 1215 Dennis Street in Midtown Houston, will be run by the Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, formerly MHMRA. Harris Center officials say the center will provide assessment, observation and short-term crisis beds; integrated care and individual treatment plans to assist with stabilization; comprehensive discharge planning with case management; and access to substance abuse treatment and housing.

Law enforcement officials, including Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg, Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo and members of the Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council attended the ribbon cutting and dedication, praising the program for decriminalizing mental illness while saving the public money.

“The Judge Ed Emmett Mental Health Diversion Center fills a gaping hole in our public service safety net, connecting those suffering from mental illness with the right resources without an unnecessary jail stay that hurts families and drains public safety resources,” Gonzalez said.

The Harris County legislative delegation has been key to establishing the center as well. State Sen. Joan Huffman and state Rep. Senfronia Thompson led the effort to create the Mental Health Jail Diversion pilot program at Judge Emmett’s office, which laid the groundwork for the diversion center.

Wayne Young, the chief executive officer of The Harris Center, said the diversion center was named for Emmett to honor the judge’s “long-standing commitment to improving the lives of persons with mental illness.”

“This is a truly humbling honor,” Emmett said. “Although my name is on the building, many others worked to make this a reality. To be clear, though, this facility is dedicated to those individuals and families who deal with mental health issues in their lives.”