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NEWS RELEASE

JUDGE EMMETT SELECTS DR. REGENIA HICKS TO HEAD MAJOR JAIL DIVERSION PROJECT

*Hicks to Lead Landmark Effort
Aimed At Keeping Mentally Ill Out Of Jail*

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett has chosen Dr. Regenia Hicks, a nationally renowned mental health and juvenile justice expert, to be the director of Harris County's effort to develop a mental health jail diversion program.

Hicks, a former research scientist with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and former deputy director of Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MHMRA) of Harris County, began work earlier this month. She will report directly to Judge Emmett.

"We were extremely fortunate to be able to find someone of Dr. Hicks' stature and skill to kick off our efforts to develop a pilot program here in Harris County," said Emmett. "Her work will help ensure that people with mental health issues receive the necessary treatment, rather than the far more expensive incarceration, for their illness."

Hicks' hiring comes after a year-long effort in the state Legislature and in Harris County to fund the effort to design a program aimed at diverting mentally ill residents away from the Harris County Jail and into appropriate medical, social and housing programs for treatment. The state will contribute \$5 million a year in funding, and Harris County will provide \$5 million a year in in-kind services. The pilot program's effectiveness on recidivism will be monitored, and the results will be presented to state officials by the end of 2016, when it will hopefully become a statewide program.

The legislation enabling the program was authored by state Sen. Joan Huffman, a recognized leader in the state Senate on criminal justice issues. State Rep. Senfronia Thompson was the House sponsor.

Hicks, a native of Minneapolis, is a graduate of Cornell University and the Wright Institute of Los Angeles. She has served on a number of boards and commissions relating to mental health and juvenile justice throughout her career.