



# PRESS RELEASE

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**New York State  
Unified Court System**

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## **Third Judicial District Launches Its First Mental Health Court in Albany**

**NEW YORK**—Third Judicial District Administrative Judge Gerald Connolly today announced the launch of the Albany Alternative and Treatment Court (AATC), a specialized part in Albany City Court targeting low-level offenders living with a mental illness related to their criminal justice involvement. The AATC is a collaborative effort of the Third Judicial District, the Albany County Executive, Albany County Department of Mental Health, Albany County Department of Probation, Albany County District Attorney's Office, Albany County Public Defender's Office, Office of the Alternate Public Defender, the local defense bar and local service providers, among other partners. Additionally, the AATC has been working with the courts' Office of Justice Initiatives' Division of Policy and Planning throughout the planning and implementation process. Albany City Court Judge John Reilly will preside over the new part.

Mental health courts seek to craft a meaningful response to the problems posed by defendants with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Addressing both the treatment needs of defendants with mental illness and the public safety concerns of communities, these specialized courts link defendants with mental illness to long-term treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

The AATC will connect eligible individuals charged with nonviolent misdemeanors or non-criminal violations to court-supervised, community-based services and treatment designed to improve their quality of life and reduce recidivism. Treatment plans will be tailored to each participant's needs. The court will offer a wide range of treatment and services, such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, medicine management and housing, education, vocational, job training and other services. Participation in the AATC is voluntary. Participants who fulfill the AATC's treatment and other requirements may have their charges reduced or dismissed.

"The AATC will bring a new array of services to a population in dire need, enabling justice-involved individuals with a mental illness to achieve long-term stability and become law-abiding members of the community," said Judge Connolly. "This new court is the result of the hard work and dedication of former Administrative Judge Thomas Breslin, County Executive Daniel P. McCoy, Dr. Stephen Giordano, Director of Albany County's Department of Mental Health, David Soares, Albany County District Attorney, Judge Reilly and numerous others."

"This is the culmination of several years of planning and coordination between many stakeholders to achieve a system that can focus and specialize in handling individuals with mental health issues that all too frequently are caught in the judicial system," said County Executive McCoy. "We are hopeful that the additional services that will be afforded by the Mental Health Court will help individuals break the cycle of recidivism and provide support to address their mental health needs."

"Congratulations to all of the stakeholders that contributed to the development of this very important initiative. Their efforts and dedication will result in a significant increase in critical services for their community." said Judge Breslin. The AATC is the first court of its kind in the Third Judicial District, which encompasses the counties of Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster. There are currently 31 mental health courts in operation across New York State and several more in various stages of planning.

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