

The Judge Ed Emmett Mental Health Diversion Center:

Five Years of Transforming Lives

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Time for a New Approach



- A revolving jail door for suspects with mental illness has not solved the recidivism problem in this population.
- Most non-violent Misdemeanor defendants are released from jail within hours, per Local Rule 9.1, on a PR bond; without medication, treatment or services.
- Even when criminal charges are filed, mental health treatment cannot be forced upon a defendant.
- A Diversion Center provides immediate mental health treatment, medication and continued support after leaving the facility.



Getting Key Leadership Buy-in



Engage key stakeholders in planning and development:

- Harris County Judge's Office
- Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Houston Police Department
- Harris County Housing Authority
- Harris County Commissioners Court
- Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- Houston Mayor and City Council
- Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD



Overview of the Emmett Center



- The 36-bed facility is open 24/7 for the pre-charge diversion of persons who would have picked up for low level, non-violent offenses.
- An officer from any law enforcement agency in Harris County may deliver the person directly to the Diversion Center.
- Eligible individuals include adults who have a history of mental illness, are not in an acute crisis, and voluntarily agree to participate.
- Emmett Center is now located in a campus-based facility offering a continuum of care.



Mental Illness or Not?



- Law enforcement officer on scene diverts directly or calls Assistant District Attorney.
- Review Special Needs Response Form (“The Orange Sheet”)
- Have the officer ask the suspect about any history of mental illness
- Look at the context and facts of the offense
 - Is the suspect homeless?
 - Is there any odd behavior?
- Joint Processing Center Diversion Desk – second catchment for diversion.



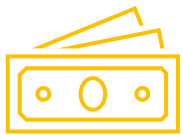
Law Enforcement Perspective



Alleviate jail overcrowding



Reduce court, legal, and other administrative costs



Reduce incarceration costs



Provide offenders with mental illness and substance use disorders essential services to address the underlying cause of their criminal behavior

Aligning with Law Enforcement



Quick and Streamlined Process:

- One-page electronic intake form
- Officer is in and out in less than 10 minutes
- Officer is not called back if person needs to be transported from diversion center
- Officer gets "credit" for the diversion



Educational Videos and Written Procedures:

- Educate officers about the jail diversion process and center. The videos and procedures are available to other law enforcement agencies.

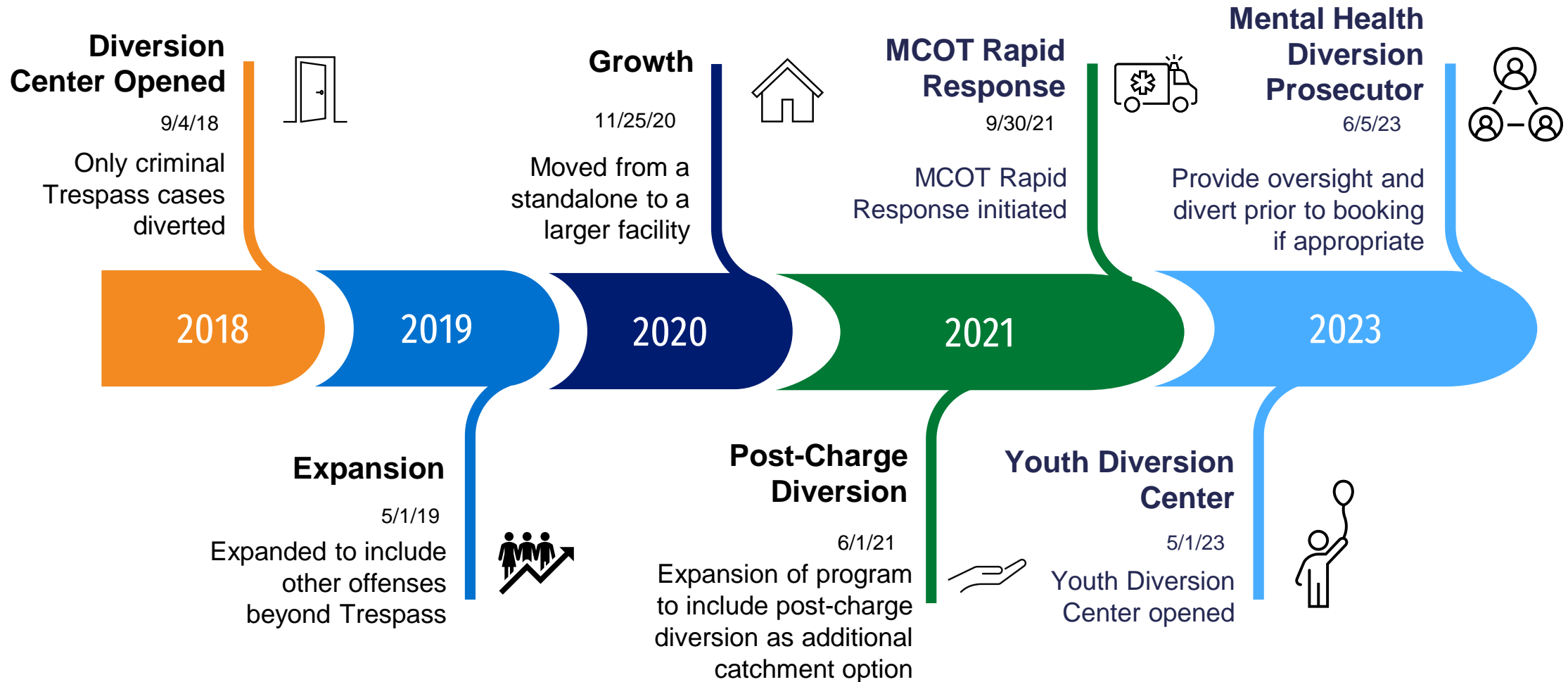


Addressing Law Enforcement's Concerns



Officer Concerns	Response
Suspect refuses to go	Officer explains that the options are diversion or jail
The Diversion Center may not accept the suspect	The Diversion Center attempts engagements with all and it is very rare to reject a suspect as a danger to staff or patients
Suspect is combative	Mental illness may present as agitation. Does the behavior amount to public safety threat?
Suspect has been diverted many times previously	There is no limit on the number of diversions as successful engagement may take time to build trust
Restitution	Many are homeless or not able to pay restitution
Suspect has mental illness but is not in crisis	Mental health crisis is not required for diversion

Five-Year Evolution of Mental Health Diversion



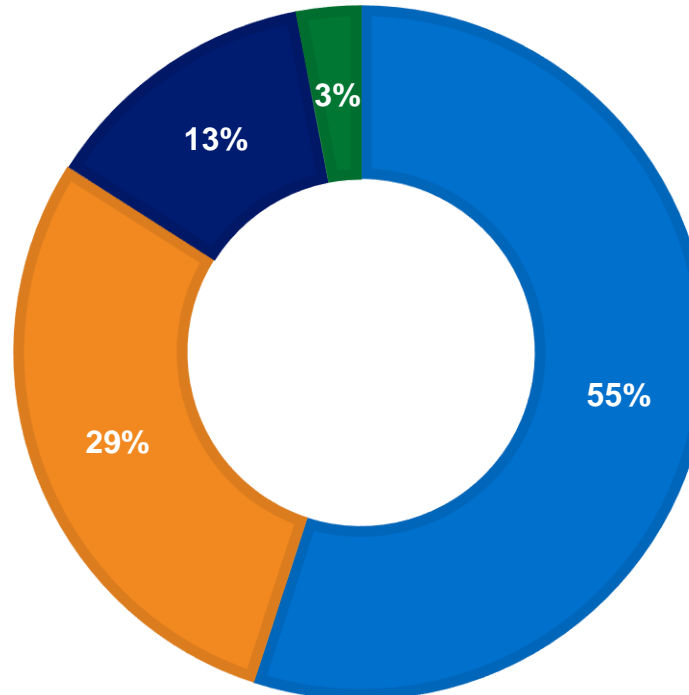
Who We Serve at the Emmett Center

Around 89% of Class B offenses is Criminal Trespass

46.5% of individuals have been diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum disorder.

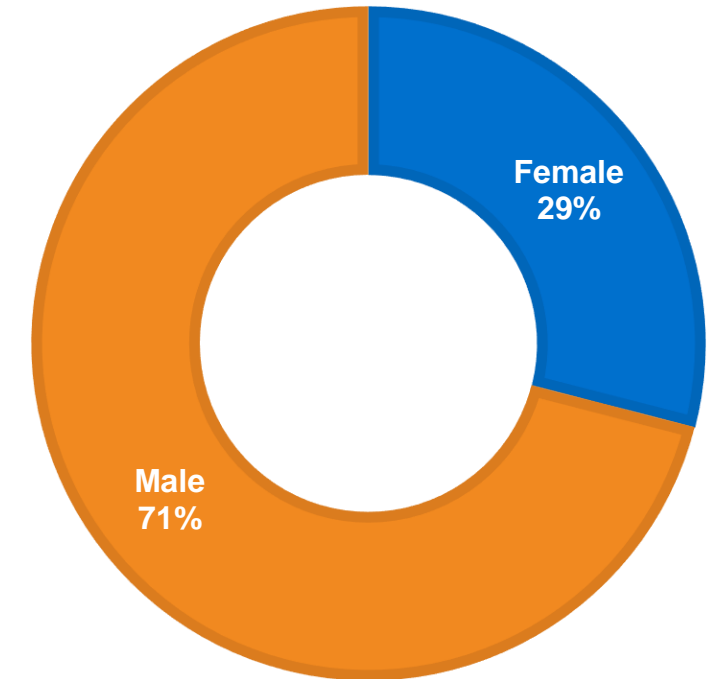
77% of individuals are homeless

ETHNICITY



■ African American / Black ■ Caucasian ■ Hispanic / Latino ■ Other


SEX








Outcomes: Recidivism



8,835 went to the Respite, Rehab, and Reentry Center instead of Harris County Jail since 2018. (August 2023)

JUSTICE SYSTEM PARTNERS  Evaluation Findings

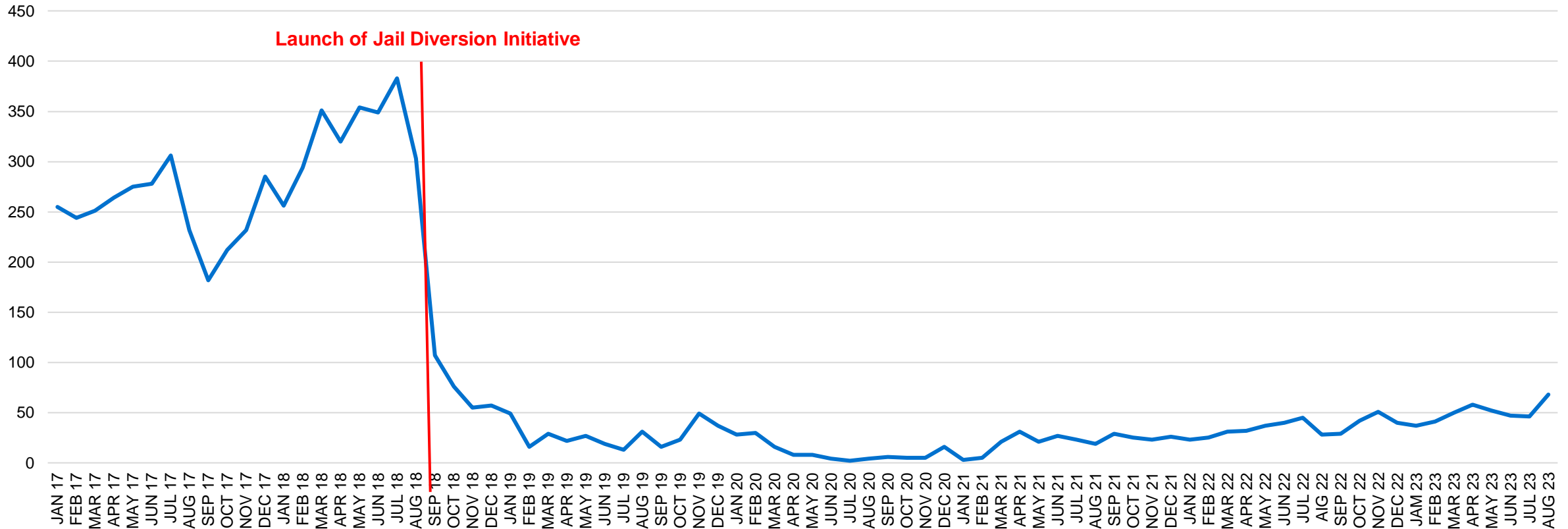
-  For every \$1 spent on jail diversion, the county avoided spending \$5.54 on criminal justice costs
-  Experienced a 50% reduction in bookings after participants were diverted
-  Those diverted were 1.3 times less likely to be booked into jail on a new charge than those in a non-diverted comparison group
-  Those diverted with 5+ bookings were 3.1 times less likely to be booked into jail on a new offense than those in a non-diverted comparison group
-  Significant declines in the number of psychiatric hospitalizations and emergency incidents



2022 County Best Practice Award

Outcomes: Impact at the Harris County Jail

Bookings for Trespass Offenses among People with Harris Center Treatment History



After implementing the Jail Diversion Program bookings dropped significantly for those individuals with a history of treatment at The Harris Center

Thank You

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