

## **Courts deal with mental illness County launches Pathways for 'incapacitated' defendants**

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REDWOOD CITY — San Mateo County Superior Court Judge George Miram announced Friday the opening of the county's new mental health court program, "Pathways."

The program was designed to ensure that defendants suffering from mental illness, who have committed crimes and are eligible for probation, receive mental health treatment outside the courtroom, Judge Mark Forcum said.

"We needed a new approach to deal with mentally incapacitated offenders," Miram said.

Pathways is a collaboration between San Mateo County's mental health community, Probation Department, Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office and Private Defender Program, Forcum said.

According to Forcum, three probation officers will work full-time, making sure individuals in the program stay on their medication and continue to go to their doctors' appointments on a regular basis. He said the program hopefully will cut back on recidivism.

To be eligible for the program, a defendant must be a resident of San Mateo County, be interested in getting help and have a history of mental illness. Individuals accused of committing more serious crimes will be ineligible for this program, Forcum said.

According to Miram, participants must be diagnosed with a mental disorder at or near the time of the offense they're accused of committing. He said the program is tailored to fit the needs of each person based on their offense and the nature of their illness.

"This is very progressive," Miram said. "It's a problem that needs a solution, and it's not an easy solution."

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