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# NASHVILLE SHERIFF

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## DAVIDSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Daron Hall, Sheriff

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **FIRST-EVER BEHAVIORAL CARE CENTER OPENS TO RESIDENTS**

*Davidson County Sheriff Daron Hall hopes to decriminalize those suffering from mental illness and transform the criminal justice system*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Nashville-Davidson County Sheriff Daron Hall announced Wednesday, the Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) Behavioral Care Center (BCC) will open to residents September 15. Construction of the first-of-its-kind BCC began two years ago and serves as an alternative to jail for mentally ill arrestees. Hall says the 60-bed center can accommodate both men and women. Initial service will begin with a small group of residents before moving to full capacity.

“Years ago, I took a special interest in this segment of our population and felt it was imperative we do more to decriminalize their illness,” Hall said. “The criminal justice system, as a whole, is not effective when dealing with mental illness. It is our responsibility as community leaders to stop just talking about the issue and take bold steps in seeking a solution.”

According to Hall, in 2015, while developing plans for the Downtown Detention Center (DDC), he decided to reallocate jail funds and construct the BCC. This unique facility provides an opportunity to place arrestees who need treatment in a therapeutic environment.

The BCC concept is to divert arrestees with qualifying charges and who also suffer from mid-to-low-level mental illness. Charges will be expunged if the resident completes his or her assigned treatment plan. A goal of the program is to remove the collateral damage associated with criminal arrests such as fines, court fees, mounting criminal histories, and stigmas linked to arrest. Finally, and maybe the most important aspect of the BCC, release planning begins immediately. It includes proper follow-up care and, for the first time, those who suffer from mental illness will not be released to the streets alone.

“I describe the police as ‘Uber’ in these situations. The officers will get the person to us and, once in booking, screeners will determine if diversion is the best option based on pre-set criteria,” Hall said. “This new concept would not be possible if it weren't for the cooperation of District Attorney Glenn Funk and Public Defender Martesha Johnson. Reforming the criminal justice system is never easy, but with supportive stakeholders, I believe Nashville is on track to make significant and impactful change.”

Nearly 100 sheriff's office staff applied for 18 BCC technician positions. Training is currently underway and focusing on a variety of subjects including crisis prevention/ intervention,

compassionate control with care, gender responsive treatment, diverse population issues, trauma-informed care, and suicide risk/prevention. These technicians will ensure safety of the residents and fellow staff members while also understanding the needs of this population are unique and special considerations should be given because residents may not fully comprehend simple instructions or daily tasks. Additionally, the clinical services will be provided by the Mental Health Cooperative.

“It is time we all understand our jails are not designed to be mental health hospitals and our correctional staff are not trained to be mental health providers,” Hall added. “I am thrilled we are embarking on a new way of doing business and focusing on a subject easy to ignore because, for decades, it’s been hidden behind the walls of our jails. As we continue on this path, I hope others across the country see there is a better way to treat the most vulnerable in our community.”

According to Hall, approximately 30 percent of the jail population suffers from some level of mental illness. The BCC sits adjacent to the new 762-bed DDC and has a separate entrance located at 433 Gay Street. The two facilities share services such as food and laundry.

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