

The Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH) is pleased to introduce Hon. John J. Specia, Jr., who serves as the Jurist in Residence (JIR) for the JCMH. This is the inaugural resource letter of the JIR program, designed to facilitate communication among the JCMH, the judiciary, and mental health stakeholders. Please forward this letter to any judges, attorneys, mental health professionals, law enforcement, or other community and state leaders who might be interested. To ensure that you regularly receive this letter, please click on the subscribe button at the bottom of this page.



## **Jurist in Residence Resource Letter**

### **From Senior District Judge John Specia (Ret.)**

#### **What is the Judicial Commission on Mental Health?**

The JCMH is a multi-disciplinary, statewide commission appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The mission of the JCMH is to engage and empower court systems through collaboration, education, and leadership, thereby improving the lives of individuals with mental health needs, substance use disorders, or intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

#### **What is the JCMH's mandate?**

On February 13, 2018, the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals issued a joint [order](#) creating the JCMH and tasking the JCMH with the following:

- Develop a strategy for improving courts' administration of justice in relation to Texas' mental health system.
- Identify and assess courts' needs to more effectively manage cases involving individuals with mental illness and intellectual disabilities.
- Promote best practices and programs.
- Improve communication and establish a collaborative model among courts and other stakeholders in the mental health system.
- Maximize the use of resources available to the judiciary.
- Promote judicial training on mental health issues.

#### **What is a Jurist in Residence?**

The JIR program was created to ensure the judicial perspective is included in the administration of court improvement programs. As a Senior District Judge who has served more than 20 years

on the bench, I understand the challenges members of the judiciary face. As JIR, my aim is to keep you apprised of the work of the JCMH, provide updates regarding changes to the mental health laws, and help communicate your questions and concerns to the JCMH. As judges who encounter mental health issues in your dockets, your experience and insight are invaluable.

### How can I get involved?

- **Subscribe to this Jurist in Residence Resource Letter.**
  - Use the subscribe button at the bottom of this page to subscribe to monthly letters with concise information about what you need to know about mental health and IDD law.
- **Attend the Judicial Summit on Mental Health.**
  - JCMH is sponsoring the second Judicial Summit on Mental Health November 18-19, 2019, in San Marcos, Texas where you will receive a legislative update, information about best practices that really work, and instruction on how to work with your community for court improvement.
- **Use the JCMH Bench Book.**
  - The Texas Mental Health and Intellectual and Development Disabilities Law Bench Book is a procedural guide for Texas judges hearing cases regarding persons with mental illness and/or IDD. A digital copy of the [Bench Book](#) and Bench Cards are available on the JCMH website. The first edition of the Bench Book covers early identification, assessments, and diversion. Future editions will include incompetency to stand trial, the insanity defense, post-conviction procedures, civil commitment, juvenile proceedings, and other important mental health and IDD topics.
- **Send us your ideas and suggestions.**
  - If you would like to participate in a workgroup or have ideas for JCMH projects, including suggestions for topics for this JIR letter, please feel free to contact me at [JCMH@txcourts.gov](mailto:JCMH@txcourts.gov).

Sincerely,



John J. Specia Jr.  
Jurist in Residence

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