

# Mental Health Diversion for Every Budget

## Speakers

*Kristi Taylor*



Kristi Taylor is the Executive Director of the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH). She has over 25 years of experience as an attorney and policymaker. After receiving a BBA with Honors in Finance from the McCombs School of Business and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Texas School of Law, Taylor represented children and parents in the child welfare system for seven years.

In 2006, Taylor was selected by the Supreme Court of Texas to create the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families. She later served as a Staff Attorney and Assistant Director of the Children's Commission. In 2017, Ms. Taylor spearheaded the planning for a new judicial commission on mental health and was named the Executive Director in 2018.

Before joining the Judicial Commission for Mental Health as a staff attorney in 2020, Kama Harris worked as a criminal defense lawyer, defending hundreds of adult and juvenile clients at all levels of the Texas criminal justice system. She began her legal career at a public defender's office, working as a mitigation specialist for death penalty cases. In that role, she gained instrumental insight on the way trauma, poverty, racism, mental health, and intellectual and developmental disabilities had an impact on her clients, their families, the community, and the legal system. Ms. Harris utilized that knowledge during her time as the First Assistant Public Defender in Burnet County, as an attorney in private practice, and now as a staff attorney with the JCMH.

*Kama Harris*



TAPS was created to provide a platform that will support and advocate for pretrial release and diversion practices which are consistent with the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Texas.

In this presentation, Kristi and Kama gave the audience diversion ideas for every budget for individuals with mental illness, substance use disorders, or intellectual and developmental disabilities. They showed short video clips from experts who used their real world experience to explain topics to the audience. Kristi and Kama identified best practices, including: connecting with community resources, effectively communicating with stakeholders, identifying the of pre-trial population, addressing the needs of clients, and effectively communicating with clients.