

# Thurston County to launch pilot Court Alternative Program on Dec. 1

Monday, October 28, 2024 4:32 pm

By The Chronicle staff

The Thurston County Court Alternative Program (TC-CAP) will launch as a pilot program on Dec. 1, the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners confirmed in a news release on Friday.

The pilot program will have a starting capacity of 10 participants.

"We will give regular updates on the program's progress to the Board of County Commissioners and will submit a final report that shares information on the program's performance measures at the end of the one-year pilot" said Thurston County Criminal Justice Regional Program Manager Leah Landon, who shared the program's key elements during a board work session on Monday, Oct. 21.

TC-CAP is a hybrid model of San Diego's Homeless Court and is designed to connect individuals to a community-based service provider who can address the underlying root cause of their criminal behavior, according to a news release.

"By connecting participants to the services they need, the program will limit or prevent further involvement in the justice system. "In cases involving non-felony charges, public safety is often best served when people are given the opportunity and support they need to stop committing crime," said Thurston County Prosecutor Jon Tunheim.

The launch of the program comes after significant collaboration and support from Thurston County District Court, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Office of Public Defense, Pretrial Services, Resource Hub, and Public Health and Social Services, according to a news release.

"This program takes an individualized approach to supporting community members involved in the justice system by creating a collaborative environment where justice system partners and local providers can address specific needs. We are excited to take this step and look forward to building on its success as we continue to find new avenues to be responsive to the needs of our community," said Thurston County Manager Leonard Hernandez.

Individuals are eligible for the program if they are indigent and have a qualifying misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor. Participation is voluntary, and referrals are made by an individual's prosecutor and public defender.

“Not only does this program support positive outcomes and reduce the risk of recidivism for program participants, but it also helps reduce strain on district court and attorney caseloads,” the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners said in a news release.

Said Patrick O’Connor, director of Thurston County’s Office of Public Defense, “Our office lends its full support to the TC-CAP program. Our defenders are overloaded with unsustainable caseloads and this program offers the opportunity to achieve better outcomes for individuals and promote public safety at the same time.”

The program is being implemented using existing resources, and no additional county funds are being used. Funding was originally set aside from Treatment Sales Tax, the Veterans Fund, and the Housing Fund, but the TC-CAP Implementation Committee determined it was not needed.

Participation is voluntary, and referrals are made by an individual’s prosecutor and public defender. The program will be housed in the Thurston County Resource Hub where staff will be responsible for connecting participants to the service provider that best fits their needs and will facilitate connections to other important services along the way.

“Cultivating a thriving community is not just an aspiration; it is an achievable goal that brings us together in a remarkable collective effort. TC-CAP effectively unifies our partnerships within the justice system and empowers the community to take an active role in shaping the support we provide to our neighbors,” said Resource Hub Program Manager Nate Block.

After engaging with a service provider, the participant’s accomplishments are shared with the TC-CAP Review Team prior to their next hearing. At this time, the team will decide on a case outcome, such as dismissing or reducing charges. If a participant is unsuccessful in the program or chooses to end their participation, they are returned to the traditional court system.

Initial service providers include:

- Olympic Health & Recovery Services — Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion
- Catholic Community Services — Arrest and Jail Alternatives Program
- Capital Recovery Center

“Based on my experience working for superior court and witnessing our community members struggling, I proposed this program four years ago when I first took office,” said Commissioner Carolina Mejia. “It’s incredibly rewarding to see it brought to life. Connecting individuals to the services they need can make all the difference in their

journey. I am eager to see the positive impact this program will bring to Thurston County.”

For more information on the pilot program, visit <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/TC-CAP>.