



Compliance program offers alternative for court, accused (4/11)

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BY [VINCENT LUPO](#) / AMERICAN PRESS

Tasha Thomas Guidry scouts right-to-counsel proceedings — or jail court — with the eye of a former correctional officer who is tempered with experience in social work.

Guidry seeks out young offenders and those with substance abuse or mental health problems who she believes can benefit from the 14th Judicial District's court compliance program.

Names of potential participants are sometimes presented to her by judges or other court officials. "I believe in rehabilitation," Guidry said.

The program is geared to people who are working return home so that they can continue to take care of their families. Most of her clients are released on their own recognizance or on a personal surety bond. They then report to Guidry for supervision.

She remains with the case until the defendant goes to trial, if the charges are rejected or the defendant is released by the judge.

Guidry screens clients and compiles individual service plans, or assessments, for them. The plans are based on clients' criminal histories, their current charges and any issues they may have, such as histories of domestic violence.

"One of my ladies, when I first began the program, was in a relationship where she was pretty much dependent on a male and had never worked, didn't have a driver's license, or anything," Guidry said. Guidry made getting a job and driver's license conditions for this client's release "based on the things I saw in her."

"As a consequence," Guidry said, "she has been working ever since she has been with me. She has a driver's license and pretty much takes care of herself now."

"I'm also a big proponent of education, because if they are educated and employed, then nine times out of 10 we're not going to see them again," Guidry added.

Guidry said some of her clients have mental health issues.

"I deal a lot with the mentally ill. I have now started referring them to mental health court," she said. Guidry works on an appointment-only basis because of the number of clients she has.

"If they need to talk, I let them know that they can come back and talk," she said. "It's a good thing for them because it makes them feel really special — and they are. I believe everyone deserves a second chance, and I believe in rehabilitation. Now if they take that chance, it's up to them."

After 10 years with the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office — her last post was shift lieutenant under Sheriff Tony Mancuso — Guidry returned to school in 2005.

She received associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice. She is now in law school. The pretrial compliance program has been in place since July of 2009. According to Guidry, "pretrial services are like enhanced probation. I do have one-on-one contact with my clients that they don't normally have with regular probation."

"I love this program," Guidry said.

She said 70 percent of her clients "are really taking advantage of what they need to do." She submits to the courts periodic reports that note the requirements clients have completed and what they are still working on, recommendations for the clients and whether she believes clients still require supervision. The court can send defendants in the program back to jail if they don't successfully complete their requirements.

Guidry makes it clear to clients during her intake process that she "can be their best friend or their worst enemy any day of the week."

"Pretty much I try to find out how I can better prepare them at court time and how I can change their mindset so that we don't have to see them back."

She has about 78 active clients, although total intake since inception of the program is 220. Some of those have been with Guidry from the beginning because they have not yet gone to court.

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