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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, Jan. 29, 2015

Hidalgo County District Attorney's Office

Ricardo Rodriguez, Jr.
Criminal District Attorney

Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

Ramon Garcia
County Judge

A. C. Cuellar, Jr.
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Joe M. Flores
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Joseph Palacios
Commissioner, Precinct 4

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DA takes steps to help law enforcement ID the mentally ill in arrest procedures

EDINBURG – Concerns raised by community mental health organizations that people who need mental health treatment are instead jailed, led Hidalgo County Criminal District Attorney Ricardo Rodriguez Jr. to pledge his support.

Rodriguez, who attended a community meeting Monday, at the Behavioral Hospital at Renaissance with Sheriff J.E. Eduardo "Eddie" Guerra, said the concerns raised indicate a need for additional training.

"We're going to reach out to local law enforcement, as well as to our Justices of the Peace and magistrates to provide assistance with training and protocols," Rodriguez said. "Most people with mental health issues deserve treatment not incarceration."

The meeting was organized by members of the Mental Health Coalition of the Rio Grande Valley, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of the Rio Grande Valley and the Behavioral Hospital at Renaissance, which is a part of Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Health System.

Rodriguez has been an advocate for better identification and treatment provided to people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Nearly two years ago, while serving as 92nd State District Judge, Rodriguez and representatives from various entities of the criminal justice system and mental health arena, asked Commissioners Court to approve a proposal for a comprehensive strategic plan to improve services.

Currently, Hidalgo County is participating in a local interagency Mental Health Officer Taskforce, which includes an affiliation between Hidalgo County Constables and Tropical Texas Behavioral Health, along with other law enforcement agencies throughout the Rio Grande Valley. The Task Force objectives include: providing a coordinated response to individuals in mental health crisis, decreasing preventable admissions and readmissions into the criminal justice system, and improving the health outcomes of these individuals by delivering appropriate care in the appropriate environment.

Assistance with screenings and assessments are available to individuals or the families of individuals with a mental health crisis. Contact Tropical Texas' 24-hour Crisis Line. For help in Hidalgo County, call (956) 289-7000, in Harlingen call (956) 364-6500 and in Brownsville call (956) 547-5400.

For information regarding the Hidalgo County District Attorney's office participation, call the Juvenile/Civil Section at (956) 318-2319.

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