

STATE SENATOR • LIZ BRATER • 18TH DISTRICT

# Brater Press Release

P.O. Box 30036 • Lansing • Michigan • 48909-7536 • 517-373-2406 • Fax: 517-373-5679  
E-mail: senlbrater@senate.michigan.gov • www.senate.mi.gov/brater



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Contact: Sen Liz Brater  
Phone: (517) 373-2406

## **Brater Helps Pass Funding for Mental Health Courts**

*Program prevents criminalization of people with mental illness, assures appropriate treatment is received*

LANSING - Today Governor Granholm's proposal to include funding for Mental Health Courts in Michigan's 2009 budget was approved by the State Senate. Mental Health Courts would allow judges to direct people with mental illness charged with minor offenses to treatment rather than jail. Senator Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) applauds the Governor for including this money in the Judiciary and Department of Community Health Budgets.

Mental Health Courts received \$550,000 in the Judiciary Budget for the operation of pilot programs, and \$1,126,900 in the DCH Budget for program implementation, which is half of the Governor's recommendation.

"As lawmakers, we must strive to find solutions to Michigan's increasing corrections costs," said Brater. "Too many people with mental illness are serving jail time when what they really need is treatment. The establishment of Mental Health Courts will ensure the best use of limited resources and appropriate sentencing for those who commit minor offenses."

In the acute phase of their condition, those with mental illness may come into contact with law enforcement and are often sentenced to prison terms. They are not always able to comply with prison rules, which may result in solitary confinement or longer sentences. Proper mental health treatment can prevent this from happening and can result in more successful rehabilitation.

Brater has worked closely with the State Budget Director and the Governor to ensure funding for Mental Health Courts as a logical, attainable reform that has the potential to improve the quality of Michigan's criminal justice system and save money for Michigan taxpayers. Data from Mental Health Courts operating since 1997 in Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Idaho, Illinois, Tennessee, and California have shown that Mental Health Courts can reduce recidivism among people with mental illness in the criminal justice system, improve public health and safety, and save taxpayer dollars.

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*State Senator Brater represents Senate District 18 which includes the cities of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Chelsea, the Villages of Barton Hills and Dexter, and the following townships: Ann Arbor, Augusta, Dexter, Freedom, Lima, Lyndon, Northfield, Salem, Scio, Sharon, Superior, Sylvan, Webster and Ypsilanti. She serves on the Appropriations Committee and is Democratic Vice Chair of the subcommittees on Natural Resources, Environmental Quality, and Judiciary and Corrections and is a member of the Higher Education Subcommittee.*