

## Summary of the Assessment Center Process

The concept of an assessment center for processing defendants (similar to triage in the medical field) evolved after confirming a need to determine the risk of an individual as early as possible in the booking process and taking appropriate steps to respond to their needs. Mental Health agencies have identified a need for a process that allows for the early identification of those with mental health issues who could be diverted from jail. Law enforcement officials are focused on getting back in-service as quickly as possible. A Pretrial Services Program requires information gathering and verifying information before the defendant's initial appearance in court. Combining those goals has led to the development of the concept of an assessment center to achieve the above mentioned objectives.

The overall goal of the assessment center will be to provide an effective and efficient process for intake and/or release of defendants brought to the Jail. After a defendant is arrested, a number of decisions must be made by the arresting officer and from a policy level by the arresting agency. Among the charging decisions is whether the defendant will be physically arrested or given a summons to appear. Among the policy decisions are what type of processing must be completed on the defendant and the location the defendant will be taken?

The concept of the assessment center should include services to improve the efficiency and, more importantly, the effectiveness of all components of the Criminal Justice System. From a law enforcement perspective, the goal of the assessment Center could be to provide Law Enforcement Authorities a single location for processing a defendant, completing paperwork and to getting them back into service as quickly as possible. From a corrections perspective, the goal could be to provide a method of classifying defendants including the first decision which is the need for immediate incarceration, the ability to gather verifiable information about a defendant at the earliest point in the process and to release defendants (which the court approves). From a Mental Health perspective, the goal could be to identify and potentially divert those, who are booked because there are no other alternatives. From a court perspective, the assessment center could result in reducing the number of initial hearings by improving information available to the court about defendants at the initial appearance stage of the proceeding. From the community perspective, the assessment center may reduce the cost of operations by using appropriate less costly alternatives when appropriate.

The below process sets out the activities that may occur when a defendant arrives at the assessment center.

- Arresting officer arrives with defendant.
- Arresting officer notifies Sheriff's staff of the offense charged.
- Weapons storage for Law Enforcement personnel.
- Two options: The officers take defendants into a separate area where they process the defendant and complete the paperwork or they turn over the defendant and go to their separate area for completing their paperwork or performing test such as sobriety.
- The sheriff security staff visible checks the defendant for injury and searches the defendant and places in a holding area.

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- Defendant's personal property is secured in temporary location. (need to be able to get wallet/pocketbook for information i.e. telephone numbers, driver's license, pay stubs for verification purposes)
- An initial medical screen and psychological screen (3-6 Questions) is completed by classification staff. If appropriate, mental health staff is requested to respond and interview the individual. Need space for Mental Health to interview.
- A classification interview may be completed by non-security staff.
- The community ties verification of the defendant is completed by telephone. A decision of hold/release is determined and the defendant is processed into the facility or released.
- When the arresting officer has completed the required paperwork, it is turned over to the corrections staff and the officer returns to service.
- The classification staff will, using computer terminals, collect information of each defendant's previous criminal history.
- Classification staff will prepare a report for the court listing the community ties and criminal history of the defendant. The defendant will be in proximity while the verification process is being completed.
- Defendant placed in a holding cell for a formal medical screening.
- The defendant will be classified and separated as required.
- The defendant will be turned over to security staff for movement.

### **Staffing:**

The assessment center should be staffed by classification/pretrial supervision staff and security staff personnel. The assessment center will be staffed 24hours a day and 7 days per week. Consideration should be given to using the assessment center as the release area for all defendants to maximize space and staff efficiency. Actual staffing levels will be determined as determination of duties and responsibilities are refined.

### **Typical Duties:**

As an example of typical duties, assessment center staff may perform the following tasks and activities:

- Initial classification
- Pre Trial assessment
- Prepare court reports
- Mental health screening
- Mental health referrals
- Initial medical screening
- Inmate supervision
- Community ties verification by telephone
- Criminal history checks by computer.

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## **Assessment Center Design and Construction Considerations:**

- personal property exchange
- Detainee searches and contraband control
- Storage for forms and property
- Open waiting and secure holding
- Arresting Agency workspace
- Adequate use of glazing to enhance observation
- Intake counter
- Interview rooms
- When inmates are admitted, the goal is to process them and move to intake housing as soon as possible, if possible, have a direct link to male intake housing and classification.
- Staff and inmate toilets
- 12 -14 foot ceilings with natural light.