



### **SDNY BRIDGE Court – Press Release May 4, 2026**

The United States District Court for the Southern District of New York is pleased to announce the approval of a three-year pilot program for a new mental health court for federal criminal defendants, BRIDGE Court. BRIDGE stands for: Behavioral Rehabilitation through Intervention, Diversion, Guidance, and Engagement.

BRIDGE Court is an intensive judicially supervised pretrial program focused on individuals whose mental health diagnosis is the predominant contributor to their offense conduct. The program blends treatment, supervision, incentives, support services, and sanction alternatives.

Participants proceed on one of three tracks: (1) a deferred prosecution agreement conditioned on successful completion of the program; (2) suspended charges for which successful completion of the program may result in reduction of charges, deferred prosecution agreement, full dismissal, or, if the case proceeds, consideration by the court in sentencing; or (3) a guilty plea, after which successful completion of the program will be taken into account by the court for sentencing.

Participants agree to take part in BRIDGE Court for approximately 12 months, though the term may be extended up to an additional 12 months. Participants agree to comply with a treatment program

and attend regular group meetings with the program's presiding Magistrate Judge, Pretrial Services Officer, and other BRIDGE Court participants.

To be eligible, participants must have a confirmed mental health diagnosis that is the predominant contributing factor to the offense conduct. Acceptance into BRIDGE Court requires approval of the United States District Judge assigned to the case, the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York ("USAO-SDNY"), and the BRIDGE Court Committee.

In working over the last year to plan and establish BRIDGE Court, the Court has partnered with the USAO-SDNY, Federal Defenders, and the Pretrial Services Office. In addition, the Court received valuable guidance from Christopher Poulos, Executive Director of the Center for Justice and Human Dignity.

The Honorable Laura Taylor Swain, Chief United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York, commended the creation of BRIDGE Court as follows:

The Judges and Pretrial Services Officers of the Southern District of New York are excited to be able to embark, in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office and Federal Defenders, on the BRIDGE Court pilot project. The BRIDGE Court, which will offer expert support and informed intensive supervision to defendants whose behavior is influenced significantly by mental health issues, is an important addition to the tools available to stakeholders in the work of achieving just, long lasting resolutions that improve the lives of individuals and the community.

On learning of the Court's approval of the creation of BRIDGE Court, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Jay Clayton, stated:

We enthusiastically support the establishment of the BRIDGE Court, an important new program to provide support and resources to defendants suffering from serious mental health conditions in appropriate criminal cases. The people of New York want us to be fair and effective in combating crime. The BRIDGE Court will provide a better path for defendants and the people of New York in appropriate cases. The Office thanks the judges of the Southern District for their efforts to address the long-standing issues arising from mental health challenges in criminal proceedings.

Tamara Giwa, Executive Director and Attorney-in-Chief of Federal Defenders of New York, commented:

Federal Defenders of New York is proud to have collaborated with the Court, the United States Attorney's Office, and Pretrial Services on BRIDGE Court. For too long, individuals with serious mental illness have cycled through the criminal legal system without receiving the treatment they need. BRIDGE Court recognizes that for defendants whose mental health is the driving force behind their offense conduct, the most effective and humane response is treatment, not punishment. We are grateful to the Court for its vision and leadership, and we look forward to standing beside our clients as they work toward recovery, stability, and the opportunity to return to their communities whole.

To be considered for the program, each individual is required to complete a Statement of Interest Form, which is available at <https://nysd.uscourts.gov>. Defense counsel may submit the completed form to: [NYSD\\_BRIDGECourt@nysd.uscourts.gov](mailto:NYSD_BRIDGECourt@nysd.uscourts.gov). If invited to apply, participants will be asked to complete a more detailed application packet. Questions about BRIDGE Court may be directed to the BRIDGE Court Pretrial Officer at [BRIDGEcourt@nyspt.uscourts.gov](mailto:BRIDGEcourt@nyspt.uscourts.gov).