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Board of County Commissioners

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Okaloosa County Cuts Ribbon on Mental Health Project

Fort Walton Beach– Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, other elected officials throughout the county and members of the public and mental health communities rallied together today to open the Okaloosa County Mental Health Diversion Program in Fort Walton Beach Wednesday morning.

The ribbon cutting – and opening of the 15-bed facility is the culmination of three years’ effort by Okaloosa County’s Board of County Commissioners, Representative Mel Ponder, Senator George Gainer and the Sheriff’s Office.

Representative Ponder and Senator Gainer were instrumental in delivering state funding to make the project a reality.

The program will lower costs to taxpayers by reducing repeat jail visits by mentally ill people accused of petty nonviolent crimes, such as trespassing or theft under \$20 – some of the most common crimes of the individuals in the jail.

“This is such a wonderful day in Okaloosa County,” said Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, “The pilot project will help reduce costs to the taxpayer and allow for less adjudication of non-violent offenders in the courts and help the mentally ill who commit petty crimes receive wrap-around services and care to re-enter the community.

The jail houses 699 people as of Tuesday morning.

More than 100 people showed up to the ribbon cutting – which officially opened the facility for use. Patients will be able to start treatment immediately in the facility.

Robert A. “Trey” Goodwin, III

Chairman, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners

***Video Available upon request**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT CHRISTOPHER SAUL AT
585-7059 OR AT CSAUL@MYOKALOOSA.COM**

