

Judge Steve Leifman served as the Associate Administrative Judge of the Miami-Dade County Court – Criminal Division from 2000 until his retirement on December 31, 2024. From 2007 – 2010, Judge Leifman served as Special Advisor on Criminal Justice and Mental Health for the Supreme Court of Florida. In this capacity, Judge Leifman was responsible for chairing the Court’s Mental Health Subcommittee, which authored a ground-breaking report entitled, *Transforming Florida’s Mental Health System*. This report, which has received considerable state and national recognition, outlines recommendations with the goal of decreasing inappropriate and costly involvement of people with mental illnesses in the justice system.

For the past twenty-four years, Judge Leifman has been at the forefront of mental health and criminal justice reform movement in the United States. From 2010 to 2018, Judge Leifman chaired the Florida Supreme Court’s Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Court. He chaired the Steering Committee on Problem Solving Courts for the Supreme Court of Florida from 2018 to 2024. In 2000, Judge Leifman established the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Criminal Mental Health Project, which aims to divert people with serious mental illnesses from the criminal justice system into treatment. He chaired this project since its inception in 2000 until his retirement.

Due to his expertise in the areas of criminal justice and mental health, Judge Leifman has been appointed to serve in a variety of capacities on local, state, and national bodies. He is the Co-Chair of the American Bar Association Criminal Justice Mental Health Committee, a Gubernatorial appointment to the Florida Statewide Task Force on Opioid Abuse and a member of The National Institute on Drug Addiction’s (NIDA) Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network. Judge Leifman is also a lifetime member of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP). He was also appointed to serve on the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness and the Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee (ISMICC) established by Congress in the 21st Century Cures Act.

In addition, Judge Leifman currently or previously served as the Co-Chair of the Judges and Psychiatrists Leadership Initiative, Co-Chair of the Miami-Dade County Mayor’s Mental Health Task Force, Board of Directors of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, Board of Directors of the Corporation for Supportive Housing, member of the National Leadership Forum for Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Services, member of the American Bar Association Task Force on Criminal Justice Mental Health Standards, Board of Advisors of the Equitas Foundation.

Judge Leifman is a Lecturer in Psychiatry at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons and a Voluntary Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Miami School of Medicine. In addition, Judge Leifman previously served as Chair of the South Florida Behavioral Health Network and currently serves as Finance Chair of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust. He is also the past Board Chair of Florida Partners in Crisis.

In recognition of his tireless efforts, Judge Leifman has received numerous awards including the 2015 William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence. One of the nation’s highest judicial honors presented by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., the Rehnquist Award is presented annually to a state court judge who exemplifies judicial excellence, integrity, fairness, and professional ethics. Judge Leifman is also the first recipient to receive the Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence (2015). Presented by the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, this prestigious award honors a state trial court judge who exemplifies judicial excellence, including strength of character, integrity, fairness, open-mindedness, knowledge of the law, sound judgment, professional ethics, intellectual courage, compassion, and decisiveness.

Judge Leifman was named by New Times as one of Miami-Dade’s most interesting people of 2017 and a 2016 Governing Magazine Public Official of the Year. Judge Leifman was also awarded the 2020 Dade County Bar Association (DCBA) David W. Dyer Professionalism Award, the most prestigious honor bestowed by the DCBA, the 2018 Pardes Humanitarian Prize in Mental Health, the 2019 Yale-NAMI Mental Health Advocacy Award, a 2019 Presidential Commendation by the American Psychiatric Association and the 2019 American College of Neuropsychopharmacology Public Service Award. On

October 22, 2023, Judge Leifman was bestowed the Papal Medal *Benemerenti* from Pope Francis and presented by Archbishop Thomas Wenski for his work in the judicial system on behalf of people with mental illnesses. In 2024, he received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Nova Southeastern University for his commitment to improving the mental health and criminal justice systems. Judge Leifman is also the recipient of the 2024 Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce Alvah H. Chapman, Jr. Award of Excellence.

Judge Leifman has also been featured in many national and local television programs, radio programs and articles regarding mental health and the criminal justice system including, The New England Journal of Medicine, the Atlantic Magazine, CBS News, USA Today, CNN: Anderson Cooper Special Report, CNN: Special Investigations Unit: The Criminally Insane, NBC Nightly News, PBS: Minds on the Edge, Facing Mental Illness, NPR: All Things Considered, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal; Governing Magazine, the Samantha Bee Show on TBS, Amanpour & Company on CNNI and PBS, NPR Podcast on the Miami-Dade Criminal Justice/Mental Health Project <https://70millionpod.com/episodes>, CBS4: The Forgotten Floor, WPLG- TV10: This Week in South Florida, WPBT2 South Florida PBS, Miami Herald and Miami Today. He has appeared as a guest on many Podcasts, and he has authored and published numerous articles and book chapters on mental illnesses and the criminal justice system. His most recent co-authored article was published in the Atlantic Magazine on May 30, 2022.

Judge Leifman is the subject of the Documentary, **The Definition of Insanity** which initially aired nationally on PBS on April 14, 2020. *The Definition of Insanity shows how one local judge's novel approach to solving the mental health crisis could be the model to tackle the much larger epidemic throughout America. Narrated by Rob Reiner.* <https://doifilm.com/>