

# 2023 Mental Health Legislative Update

## Speaker

*Kama Harris*

Before joining the Judicial Commission for Mental Health in 2020, Kama Harris worked as a criminal defense lawyer, defending hundreds of adult and juvenile clients at all levels of the Texas criminal justice system. She began her legal career at a public defender's office, working as a mitigation specialist for death penalty cases. In that role, she gained instrumental insight on the way trauma, poverty, racism, mental health, and intellectual and developmental disabilities had an impact on her clients, their families, the community, and the legal system. Ms. Harris utilized that knowledge during her time as the First Assistant Public Defender in Burnet County, as an attorney in private practice, and now as a staff attorney with the JCMH.



## Summary



This conference introduced trial lawyers to the manifestations of common mental illnesses, deficiencies, and other conditions which affect our ability to communicate with and present complete pictures of our clients. Attendees were taught how to work with mental health professionals and their clients to present a compelling case for life. This program also provided training in trial topics to include juvenile Mental Health/Chapter 55 and factors to consider when working with clients who have a mental illness.

Kama presented updates on mental health law after the 88th Legislative Session. During the 88th Legislative Session, JCMH leaders, Commissioners, Collaborative Council Members, and staff served as resources for the Legislature for all bills related to mental health law. Twelve JCMH proposals were adopted by the Judicial Council; six of those proposals passed and became law on September 1, 2023.