

SBLM Architects' Design of First-of-its-Kind Mental Health Center; Meets Baker Act Mandates

Soon-to-open Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery offers new paradigm for treatment of mental illness & alternatives to homelessness & incarceration

MIAMI, FLORIDA , UNITED STATES,
October 17, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ --

The design of the recently completed [Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery](#) by [SBLM Architects](#) includes key criteria mandated in the Baker Act -- such as hospital emergency intake centers and emergency vehicle access -- while providing multiple environments conducive to the treatment and recovery of persons with mental illness. Most importantly, the Center offers a viable and cost-efficient alternative to incarcerating a population that has proven to be responsive to clinical treatment. It also addresses options for a significant portion of the homeless population in Miami.



The Baker Act of 1971, aka the Florida Mental Health Act, allows for the temporary detention of individuals for mental health examinations, for up to 72 hours on a voluntary or involuntary basis. To address the law's requirements, the Center's design includes dedicated intake-and-receiving areas and a special sallyport entry for emergency vehicles. Access to the facility is additionally facilitated at grade level with such features as separate waiting rooms for incoming-and-outgoing patients, four assessment and examination rooms, and a secure corridor to a Crisis Stabilization unit.

"Just entering facilities of this nature traditionally has been intimidating for patients and

frustrating for first responders,” says SBLM Principal James Cohen, AIA LEED AP, who heads the firm’s Miami office. “Among our design objectives was to make intake intuitive for all parties, so that legal and clinical assessments could quickly follow.”

The seven-story facility, located at 22nd Street and Northwest Seventh Avenue, is an adaptive reuse of a 180,000-square-foot property owned by the state and leased to Miami-Dade County. The ultimate goal of this 208-bed facility is to divert people with mental illnesses from the criminal

justice system, while facilitating recovery and transitioning them to permanent housing.

Conceived by Judge Steven Leifman, Associate Administrative Judge in the criminal division of the 11th Circuit Court of Florida, the SBLM design supports the original intent, literally, floor by floor.



Adding to the Center’s functionality is the inclusion of a first-floor Hearing Room with judge and magistrate chambers for related hearings and legal proceedings.

With the ground-floor consigned to intake, assessment, and legal procedures, the second floor offers a separate and secure Crisis Stabilization Unit with 16 beds, Outpatient Medical Clinics, two separate office suites with 15 offices for support services, a conference center set up for professional and educational training – including law enforcement training for this special population -- and a peer-supervised “respite area” for persons who do not meet the Center’s crisis criteria but have nowhere else to go.

Also on the expansive second floor is a secure wing for the residents that includes a gymnasium, multi-purpose day rooms, visitation areas, and access to a 33,000-square-foot secure, outdoor recreation area with landscaping, seating, walking path, planting areas, and basketball court in a parklike setting.

On the third floor is a dedicated mechanical equipment area that also provides a physical and acoustical buffer from the resident sleeping areas, which are located on the fourth through seventh floors.

Further distinguishing the innovative design of the Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery is the flexibility of the separate care or sleep pods, with each floor having six eight-bed pods, which allows for organization of patient care. Moreover, a maximum of five beds may be

assigned to each of the private bathrooms on resident floors, reinforcing privacy and personal dignity.

Centrally located nursing stations are situated on the resident floors at each three-pod area to provide supervisory support. In addition, resident floors have dedicated support areas consisting of a pharmacy, examination room, professional therapy offices, laundry, and dining room. As a resident's condition stabilizes, there can be relocations to higher floors that provide increasingly independent living opportunities.

To date, no other mental health facility in the country has been designed with the goal of helping facilitate an underserved and largely misunderstood population's return to society – with all the needs provided under one roof!

Once open, it is anticipated the decade-long project will change both the perception of traditional treatment protocols for people suffering from mental illness and the design of those facilities. At a cost of approximately \$51 million to build, it is estimated that Miami-Dade County will save millions of dollars each year by providing a comprehensive treatment program for this population currently being held in county detention facilities.

ABOUT SBLM ARCHITECTS

Established in 1993, SBLM Architects has five interconnected, Principal-headed Studio offices in New York City, Long Island, NY, Miami, FL, and Dallas, TX. With more than three decades in practice, SBLM has completed thousands of projects throughout the U.S., providing environmentally responsible solutions for such market categories as Healthcare, Education, Mixed-use and Residential, Retail and Commercial, and Civic environments. SBLM's dedicated family of architects and designers, creative problem-solvers, insightful planners, and seasoned collaborators continue to meet the needs of our clients' visions, delivering design solutions that inspire, connect, perform, and drive business.

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