

**Probate Court of Jefferson County**  
**Alan L. King, Judge of Probate**

**Frequently Asked Questions about Bryce Hospital**

Bryce Hospital, located in Tuscaloosa, AL, is owned and operated by the State of Alabama Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation. Bryce Hospital provides treatment for individuals who are experiencing acute symptoms of a severe mental illness and those who need hospital care for symptoms they have had for a long time. A patient's treatment team at Bryce includes a psychiatrist, nurse, medical doctor, social worker, psychologist, therapeutic recreational therapist and dietician.

**How long will my family member be at the local hospital before they are transferred to Bryce?**

A bed at Bryce Hospital must become available before your family member can be transferred to Bryce. While the length of time will vary, individuals are usually transferred to Bryce Hospital within five business days.

**How can I participate with my family member's treatment at Bryce?**

Family involvement is very important in the treatment process, and families are encouraged to keep in frequent contact with the social worker. They are also encouraged to attend treatment-planning conferences and participate in the Family Education Program. It is important to remember that family involvement is based on your family member's willingness to have you participate with treatment and discharge planning.

**How can I contact my family member?**

You can reach individuals at Bryce by calling the Bryce Switchboard at 205-759-0799 and leave a message. Your family member will call you back when they are given an opportunity to return the call.

**When can I visit my family member?**

Visiting hours are from 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM, every day of the week. Please call in advance to confirm if your family member is available for visiting hours. You can also visit the Bryce facilities by contacting the Director of Volunteer Services at 205-759-0448.

**How long will my family member be at Bryce?**

The length of time an individual stays at Bryce Hospital to receive treatment varies depending on individual needs. The treatment team will work with your family member to determine when he or she is ready to be released and return to community treatment.

**Where can my family member go when they are discharged?**

If your family member can not go home, the treatment team can help find another place for your family member to live, such as a transitional home, foster home, group home, apartment, Thomasville Mental Health Rehabilitation and other treatment programs such as alcohol/drug treatment programs.

**How can I contact the Bryce Business office?**

You can reach the business office at 205-759-0727 or 205-759-0729. Money mailed directly to individuals is not encouraged. Arrangements can be made to create an account for the patient with the business office.

**Mary Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center**

This center is a specialized unit of Bryce Hospital that provides treatment to individuals over the age of 65 years and who are experiencing acute symptoms of a severe mental illness. This is a separate treatment facility located on the Bryce Campus. If you have questions, please contact the Director of Social Work at 205-759-0902.

**Veterans Administration Hospital in Tuscaloosa**

The VA Hospital in Tuscaloosa provides treatment to individuals who are eligible for veterans services and are experiencing acute symptoms of severe mental illness. This is a separate treatment facility located not far from the Bryce Campus. If you have questions, please contact the hospital at 205-554-2000.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS

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## **What is an involuntary commitment?**

A procedure whereby a person is involuntarily placed in the custody of the Alabama Department of Mental Health for psychiatric treatment.

## **Who can file a petition for involuntary commitment?**

Any person, 19 years or older, may seek to have another person, 19 years or older, committed.

## **What are the legal requirements for a person to be committed?**

1. A person (called the respondent) is mentally ill and treatment is available for the person's mental illness..
2. Due to the mental illness, the person poses a real and present threat of substantial harm to self or others.
3. A person's behavior is not due to drug and/or alcohol use and/or abuse.
4. A person will continue to deteriorate from the mental illness if not treated.
5. A person is unable to make rational and informed decision about treatment for the mental illness.
6. A person can not be committed if they have any current felony charges pending on them.
7. Commitment is the least restrictive treatment alternative available for the person.

## **How does the involuntary commitment process work in Jefferson County?**

Social workers from JBS Mental Health Authority work with the Probate Judge to assist individuals, families, local agencies and mental health professionals throughout the commitment process.

First, a petition must be completed at Probate Court, located in the Jefferson County Court House. A social worker will assist the petitioner in completing the paperwork.

If the respondent is located in the community, a social worker will work with the respondent, petitioner, local mental health professionals and Probate Judge to assess the appropriateness for commitment and determine if there are less restrictive treatment options. If needed, the respondent may be transported by court order to a local hospital by the Jefferson County's Sheriff Department.

If the respondent is already located at a local hospital, a social worker will work with the hospital and Probate Judge throughout the commitment process.

If the petition has been approved by the Probate Judge and the respondent is located in a local hospital, a probable cause hearing will be held at the local hospital where the respondent is receiving treatment.

## **What are the possible outcomes of the probable cause hearings?**

1. Commitment to the Alabama Department of Mental Health. In Jefferson County, a person goes to Bryce Hospital or the VA Hospital in Tuscaloosa.

2. Outpatient commitment to a local, designated mental health center.
3. The Probate Judge could continue the case for a final hearing, allowing the local hospital to further evaluate the respondent.
4. The Probate Judge could dismiss the case and the respondent would be free to leave the local hospital at any time.

## **Who can testify at the probable cause hearing?**

1. The petitioner is required by law to be at the hearing to testify.
2. The treating psychiatrist who is treating the patient while in the local hospital.
3. Any witnesses listed on the petition who saw the dangerous behavior of the respondent.

Please call our office to find out the dates and times of probable cause hearings.

**If you have any questions about involuntary commitments, please contact our office at 325-5009.**

**Jefferson County Probate Court**  
Jefferson County Courthouse, Room 150  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
Phone (205) 325-5009  
Fax (205) 325-1437