

**Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs
“FY 2017 Outside Witness Testimony”**

**Statement of former Chief Justice of Alabama Sue Bell Cobb on behalf of the
National Association of Drug Court Professionals
March 15, 2016**

To Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Mikulski, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony and respectfully request my statement be entered into the record.

As we as a nation look for models of criminal justice reform, we need to look no further than Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts. They are evidence-based criminal justice reform in action that have successfully reduced crime, saved billions of tax dollars, and transformed the lives of over 1.25 million citizens for decades.

I ask for you to support criminal justice reform in action by ensuring \$50 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$10 million for Veterans Treatment Courts at the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs in Fiscal Year 2017.

In my home state of Alabama, we have seen firsthand the impact Drug Courts can have on substance abuse and crime. **Thus, earlier this month, 28 Drug Court Judges throughout the state signed a letter to Senator Shelby urging for funding for these life-saving programs. I have included a copy of the letter in my testimony.**

For far too long, we attempted to incarcerate our way out of an epidemic of substance abuse and crime instead of addressing the core issue of addiction. Our first Drug Court in Alabama launched in 1993, and since then, another 116 have opened their doors. As a Chief Justice, I felt I had an obligation to ensure that justice in my state was meted out as effectively, efficiently and with the greatest results on public safety as possible. This is the reason I pushed so ardently for the establishment of Drug Courts. And I am not alone. The Conference of Chief Justices, an organization of which I am proud to have been a member, represents the highest state judicial officers in the nation. The Conference has called Drug Courts “the most effective strategy for reducing drug abuse and criminal recidivism among criminal offenders.” As former Chairman of the Conference of Chief Justices, Conference of State Court Administrators Criminal Justice and Evidenced-Based Sentencing Committee, I can assure you that the Chief Justices and State Court Administrators are adamant in their support of data-driven solutions to drug-induced crime. The answer is Drug Courts.

And the U.S. Government Accountability Office agrees. In 2011, it released its fourth report on Drug Courts, concluding once again that Drug Courts reduce recidivism and cut crime. The report confirmed that Drug Courts reduce crime by up to 58%.

There is no questioning the explosive impact that substance abuse has had on our criminal justice system. As a nation, we annually spend a staggering \$60 billion on corrections, an investment that has done little to stem the tide of crime or substance abuse. Half of the nation's prison population is clinically addicted to drugs or alcohol. Upon their release, nearly all will relapse into substance abuse, and as many as 80% will commit a new crime (typically drug-related). In this revolving door pattern, it is easy to see why spending on corrections remains exorbitant. Given the abysmal outcomes of incarceration on addictive behavior, there's absolutely no justification for state governments to continue to waste tax dollars feeding a situation where generational recidivism is becoming the norm, and parents, children and grandparents may find themselves locked up together. This is simply an appalling fiscal policy. But there is a solution.

From serving our veterans addicted to prescription drugs to aiding countless methamphetamine addicts; from helping juveniles addicted to designer drugs to parents facing the loss of their children to addiction; from rural towns to our largest cities; from an alternative to incarceration to re-entry into the community, Drug Courts save vast resources and tax dollars by reducing drug abuse, crime and recidivism at a level unmatched by any other program in our nation's history.

However, we have a long way to go. The Department of Justice has reported that 1.2 million offenders would be eligible for Drug Court if one were made available to them. To be smart on crime, we must expand the existing Drug Court system to ensure every eligible offender receives a chance at these life-saving programs.

Now more than ever, we must focus on proven programs that guarantee financial returns and measurable success. There is simply no better investment this Congress can make than in Drug Courts. Drug Courts have been proven through rigorous scientific research to decrease crime, save taxpayer dollars, rehabilitate offenders, and restore families and communities. No other criminal justice or behavioral healthcare program has a comparable record of success or such strong bipartisan support in Congress. One would be hard-pressed to identify another federal program that has been as avidly endorsed and sustained by states and counties. Supported by policy analysts on both ends of the political spectrum, Drug Courts offer a roadmap for a practical, evidence-based and fiscally conservative drug policy that works.

I strongly urge an investment of \$50 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$10 million for Veterans Treatment Courts at DOJ. Adequate funding for Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts will ultimately save countless lives and tax dollars in not only Alabama, but every state in this great nation.

Joint Letter from Alabama Drug Court Judges

Hon. Richard Shelby
United States Senate
304 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0103

Dear Senator Shelby:

Please accept our sincere gratitude for all that you did to support the funding of Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts in the Department of Justice budget during this past session. We are grateful that you are in such an important leadership position that is so critical to Drug Court funding. Alabama has 110 Drug Courts, Veterans Treatment Courts, and Mental Health Courts, all of which benefit from your efforts to ensure increased funding for Drug and Veterans Treatment Courts.

For over 25 years, Drug Courts, and now more recently Veterans Treatment Courts, have successfully reduced crime, saved billions of tax dollars nationwide, and transformed the lives of over 1.25 million people. As you begin to consider the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriation, we ask for your support to ensure continued funding of this essential effort to keep Alabamians and Americans safe.

Alabama has previously been recognized for the largest increase in the number of model Drug Courts. Why? We as judges realize that Drug Courts work, and we are willing to spend significant time and energy to work with local Drug Court teams to change people's lives. Alabama has one of the most overcrowded and least-funded prison systems in the nation, and, like other states, has been ineffective in reducing recidivism. Consequently, Alabama's drug-addicted offenders, their families, and future employers receive an even greater benefit from the accountability—such as random drug testing and increased supervision—and appropriate consequences imposed by the 110 Drug Courts throughout our state.

We urge you to fund \$50 million for Drug Courts and \$10 million for Veterans Treatment Courts at the Department of Justice.

Sincerely yours,

Circuit and District Judges of Alabama

 J. David Jordan Escambia
Signature Print Name District/County

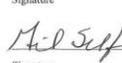
 FRED R. STEARNS DALE
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 SCOTT R. TAYLOR Calhoun
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 R.E. Armstrong^{JE} Dallas Co. District Court
Signature Print Name District/County

 ROBERT SMITH Circuit Judge 3rd Circuit
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 HENRY ALVED District Judge Walker Co.
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 GIL SELF Circuit Judge Lauderdale
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 DEBORAH H. BIGGS Macan District Judge
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 J. Michael Joiner Al. Court of Civ. App.
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 HILDA S. FLOYD 27th/Macell Co.
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 SYLVIA RICHARDSON Madison (25th)
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 ROBERT L. MOORE St. Clair
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 PHILIP K. SEAY St. Clair (30th)
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 ROBERT WITTERS Baldwin (28th) retired
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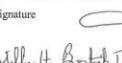
 BRADLEY PYRNE Escambia
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 WANDA PHILLIPS Calhoun
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 TIM RILEY Circuit
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