

**House 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 Judge Ruben C. Reyes, Lubbock County, Texas  
Chairman, National Association of Drug Court Professionals**

**on behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals  
March 31, 2016**

To Chairman Culberson, Ranking Member Honda, 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.

If we as a nation are truly committed to evidence based criminal justice reform, we need look no further than Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts for a solution. The Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and the Veterans Treatment Court initiative at the Department of Justice play a critical role in helping states implement best practices and need your continued support.

As a District Court judge for a decade and Lubbock County Drug Court Judge for the past eight years, I have seen firsthand the revolving door of the justice system and how it can be reversed when evidence based programs are utilized. The transformation that is occurring with the participants who enter Drug Court is remarkable. Individuals whose lives were saved because of Drug Court, families that are healing because of Drug Court, and communities that are restored because of Drug Court.

Conservative criminal justice reform advocates in Texas made the case over a decade ago that reducing the prison population, treating drug addiction, and giving a second chance were ideals worth funding. Expanding Drug Courts statewide was a key part of our reform effort. As a result of the reforms lead by then Governor Perry and the state legislature we saw a 12-percent reduction in our incarceration rate since 2009 and its lowest crime rate since 1968.

There is no questioning the explosive impact that substance abuse has had on our criminal justice system. The United States has 5% of world population yet our nation imprisons almost 25% of world’s prison population at annual cost of \$80 billion. 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 and countless methamphetamine addicts; to helping juveniles addicted to designer drugs and parents facing the loss of their children due 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.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office agrees. In 2011 they 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%. Drug Courts return \$2.21 for every \$1 invested when considering only direct and measurable offsets such as reduced re-arrests, law enforcement contact, court hearings and the use of jail or prison beds.

When considering other benefits, including reduced foster care placement and healthcare utilization, Drug Courts benefit the economy by as much as \$27 for every \$1 invested. As a result, Drug Courts save up to \$13,000 for every individual they serve. 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 there was one made available to them.

Veterans Treatment Courts offer a similarly promising strategy for responding to veterans who suffer from serious mental health issues and substance abuse or dependency issues. 81% of justice-involved veterans had a substance-abuse problem prior to incarceration and twenty-five percent were identified as mentally ill. Twenty-three percent of justice-involved veterans were homeless at some point in the year prior to their arrest. Approximately 13,200 veterans are currently participating in Veterans Treatment Courts.

I encourage this committee to focus on proven programs which guarantee financial returns and measurable success. Scientific research prove Drug Courts decrease crime, save taxpayer dollars, rehabilitate offenders and re-unite families. Years of research indicate Drug Courts are a part of an effective practical, evidence-based and fiscally conservative drug policy. It is established that Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts save lives, tax dollars, not only in Texas, but in every state in this great nation.