

Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

“FY 2020 Outside Witness Testimony”

**Statement of Judge Alan Blankenship, Circuit Court of Stone County, Missouri  
on the Drug Treatment Court program at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services  
Administration, Department of Health and Human Services**

**on behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals**

June 3, 2019

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of this nation’s more than 3,000 drug treatment courts and the 150,000 people they will connect to life-saving addiction and mental health treatment this year. Given the unprecedented success of drug treatment courts and the growing need in communities around the country for solutions to the addiction epidemic, **I am requesting the Congress maintain the enacted fiscal year 2019 number of \$70 million for the Drug Treatment Court Program at the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).**

I serve as the associate circuit judge in Stone County, Missouri, where, for much of my 17-year tenure, I have presided over our county’s drug treatment courts. I have never come across a more effective approach to promoting public health while protecting public safety. Strong evidence shows it reduces not only crime but also the heavy taxpayer burden wrought by an overcrowded justice system. In fact, I’ve dedicated much of my professional career to expanding the model as chair of the Missouri Supreme Court Committee for Treatment Courts, president of the Missouri Association of Treatment Court Professionals and a faculty member for the National Drug Court Institute. But, most importantly, at home in Stone County, I preside over our adult drug court, DWI court and veterans treatment court.

Stone County is a rural, relatively quiet part of Southwest Missouri, but we are not immune from the chaos and suffering caused by addiction and related crime. Over the course of my career, I’ve seen thousands of individuals cycle in and out of our justice system, committing crimes in service to their addiction or mental health disorder. Our drug treatment courts unite public safety and public health to put a stop to that cycle. We hold offenders accountable for their actions and connect them with evidence-based treatment to address the underlying cause of the crime so it doesn’t happen again.

I am proud to report that funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration allows our drug treatment court programs to expand capacity, offering more evidence-based treatment for more people in the justice system in need. Our SAMHSA dollars allow us to partner with Drury University in Springfield, Missouri for ongoing, independent evaluations of our program, giving us the statistics to show our federal, state and local funding is

a positive investment in the future of our community. This work helps us end the generational cycle of addiction we see all too often in Stone County.

Several years ago, I met Kelly, a young mother raising her son in the midst of a severe addiction to methamphetamine. After multiple arrests and a stint in prison, where she was not offered the treatment she desperately needed, Kelly found herself in front of me in the Stone County Adult Drug Court.

In drug treatment court, each participant is assessed and given a treatment plan designed for their unique success – often including medication-assisted treatment as one of the many tools for helping participants find a path to recovery. Kelly received treatment specific to her unique needs.

Treatment, of course, is not enough. Kelly was held accountable by a multi-disciplinary team of law enforcement, probation, defense counsel, prosecution and case management. She frequently appeared before me so I could review her progress, reward her for doing well and encourage her when she faltered. Together, the team provided the ongoing supervision and support expected of our justice system by the community.

Today, Kelly is a productive member of our community. She credits drug treatment court with saving her life. As is often the case, Kelly's addiction negatively impacted her son, Shane. Shane also suffered a severe addiction of to methamphetamine and following an arrest, he too was placed in my drug treatment court. With the help of his mom, now sober, and the accountability of our court, Shane is now living a life in recovery and helping to raise his child – a child that will grow up with a father and grandmother free from addiction and crime. The generational cycle stopped with Shane.

Kelly and Shane are just two examples of the 150,000 people nationally who get access to treatment through drug treatment courts each year. What started as an experiment three decades ago is today the most successful strategy for addressing addiction and mental health in the justice system. In fact, no other intervention in our nation's history has anywhere near comparable evidence of both reducing recidivism and saving taxpayer dollars.

The Government Accountability Office finds drug treatment courts reduce crime by up to 58 percent. Further, in what is widely regarded as the most comprehensive study on drug treatment courts to date, the Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation (MADCE) confirmed drug treatment courts significantly reduce both drug use and crime and found cost savings averaging \$6,000 for every individual served. The MADCE further found drug treatment courts improve education, employment, housing and financial stability for nearly all participants. They are proven to promote family reunification, reduce foster care placements and increase the rate of addicted mothers delivering babies who are fully drug-free.

But the dollars and cents of drug treatment court is never a substitute for the real successes of people who not only rise above their burden on society but contribute positively to their community. When a young man named Keaton came to my courtroom almost 10 years ago,

I could tell he was smart but headed down the wrong path. He had an addiction to opioids and was committing crimes in our community to support it. But after intense treatment and ongoing accountability, Keaton came around. Soon, he was on the path to recovery and, for the first time in a long time, he had his sights set on the future. Keaton went to college, graduating with a degree in nursing. But with a new lease on life, Keaton wanted more – he eventually went back to school and today is a doctor of nurse anesthesia. When that smart young man stood before me, I was focused on saving his life – little did I know he'd be saving lives himself just a few years later.

Our program in Stone County benefits greatly from federal funding provided by the Department of Health and Human Services. I strongly urge this committee to recommend level funding to the Drug Treatment Court Program so people like Kelly, Shane, Keaton and the 1.5 million others served by drug treatment courts in the last 30 years don't slip through the cracks of our justice system.