

SAMPLE OP-ED

Celebrating National Drug Court Month

A courtroom is not a place where you expect to find scenes of celebration and tears of joy. Unless, of course, it's drug court. This May, drug courts throughout [state] will join more than 4,000 such programs nationwide in celebrating National Drug Court Month. This year alone, more than 150,000 individuals nationwide who entered the justice system due to addiction will receive lifesaving treatment and the chance to repair their lives, reconnect with their families, and find long-term recovery. National Drug Court Month is a celebration of the lives restored by drug court, and it sends the powerful message that these programs must be expanded to reach more people in need.

More than 30 years ago, the first drug court opened its doors with a simple premise: Rather than continue to allow individuals with long histories of addiction and crime to cycle through the justice system at great expense to the public, use the leverage of the court to keep them engaged in treatment long enough to be successful. Today, drug courts and other treatment courts have proven that a combination of accountability and compassion saves lives while also saving valuable resources and reducing exorbitant criminal justice costs.

[Insert a brief graduate success story. Example: Several years ago, a young woman entered our treatment court. After years of struggling with a substance use disorder, she resorted to stealing to

support her addiction. She was arrested numerous times, but nothing changed. She was facing years in prison when she got the chance to participate in our treatment court.

In treatment court, she met regularly with a case manager and received rigorous treatment and counseling. With the help of the court team, including community-based treatment providers, she began to put her life back together. While in the program, we helped her enroll in college and find part-time work. She completed the treatment court program and went on to get her bachelor's degree and reconnect with her family.

Today, she has no criminal record holding her back. She is happy, healthy, employed and contributing to our community.]

This is just one of the thousands of individual stories that demonstrate why treatment courts are so critical in the effort to address addiction and related crime. And the scientific research agrees: Numerous studies have found that treatment courts reduce crime and drug use and save money. Research shows treatment courts also improve education, employment, housing, financial stability, and family reunification, which reduces foster care placements.

Treatment courts represent a compassionate approach to the ravages of addiction. This year's National Drug Court Month celebration should signal that the time has come to reap the economic and societal benefits of expanding this proven budget solution to all in need.