

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

Outside Witness Testimony
Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations

Statement of Eli Parson
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San Francisco, California

on behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

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Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of the 1.5 million graduates of treatment court programs and the 150,000 people the programs will connect to lifesaving addiction and mental health treatment this year alone. Given the overlapping crises of substance use and the impact of COVID-19, **I am requesting the Congress provide funding of \$80 million for the Drug Treatment Court Program at the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for fiscal year 2022.**

I am writing to you today as a treatment court graduate, father, and an advocate for parents and children affected by substance use disorder. I am a 2008 graduate of the San Francisco Family Treatment Court—a program of the family civil court system that allowed me to remain a father while connecting me with the support, treatment services, and parental coaching I needed to overcome a lifelong substance use disorder. Without the support of the court, my now 13-year-old daughter would be growing up in the child welfare system without her father. Instead, she is a healthy, thriving teenager preparing for her first year of high school with me by her side. Family treatment court drastically changed the trajectory of both our lives.

Since 2011, I have worked for the Homeless Prenatal Program, an organization that serves, among other child welfare programs, the San Francisco Family Treatment Court. In that role, I witness firsthand the transformation and triumph families experience as parents overcome substance use disorders and are reunited with their children. But I'm also seeing the grips of twin crises on families coming to me for help: the substance use epidemic and the ongoing effects of COVID-19, including isolation and economic devastation. Treatment courts, such as adult drug courts, veterans treatment courts, family treatment courts, and others, offer a public health and public safety response to these crises as they seek to expand and enhance substance use treatment capacity to serve more individuals in their communities.

With overwhelming empirical evidence showing their effectiveness, it is easy to see that treatment court programs across the country merit continued funding. The Government Accountability Office finds the drug court model reduces crime by up to 58 percent. Further, the Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation conducted by the Department of Justice confirmed drug treatment courts significantly reduce both drug use and crime, as well as finding a cost savings averaging \$6,000 for every individual served. Additional benefits include improved employment, housing, financial stability, and reduced foster care placements.

Beyond the numbers, drug treatment court programs are making a difference in real lives of families across the country, including mine. When my daughter was born in 2007, child welfare services prevented me from bringing her home from the hospital. At that time, I was in the midst of a decades-long battle with substance use. Childhood trauma led me to try alcohol at age 12, harder drug use by age 14, homelessness at age 16, and a lifelong struggle with depression and anxiety. Leaving the hospital empty-handed was the most painful moment of my

life. It was then I knew I had to do what I could to earn the right to bring my daughter to the home she deserved. I knew I wanted to change – I just needed help.

I found that help in the San Francisco Family Treatment Court. Until I entered the program, my experience with the court system left me feeling silenced in my own battle to be healthy and regain custody of my daughter. In family treatment court, I found hope for the first time, something I'd longed to feel for years. Suddenly, I became an active participant in a journey to finding my own health and safety so that I could guarantee the same for my daughter when we were reunited. The multidisciplinary team of the judge, child welfare officers, substance use treatment providers, and others were committed to ensuring I received the intensive outpatient treatment and other social services I needed to ensure my daughter could be reunited with a father free of substance use.

The substance use disorder treatment services I received through this treatment court program allowed me to realize my life's greatest achievement: fatherhood. My daughter has never known the man sent away from the hospital that day in 2007, and it's because of the San Francisco Family Treatment Court.

I'm not alone in my success. Treatment courts have reunited thousands of families by connecting those with mental health and substance use disorders with treatment options best suited to them, including medication-assisted treatment when deemed appropriate by a medical provider. Together, the court team offers the tools to overcome addiction and past trauma to create meaningful, healthy relationships.

Continued support from the Drug Treatment Program at the Department of Health and Human Services ensures the nearly 4,000 treatment courts in the United States today provide

critical treatment services to reunite loving families. But we know there are many more who still need this opportunity. I strongly urge this committee to recommend funding of \$80 million to the Drug Treatment Court Program in fiscal year 2022, so families like mine continue to receive lifesaving substance use treatment services.