

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

Outside Witness Testimony
Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations

**Statement of Hon. Andrew Toynbee
Judge, Superior Court of Lewis County, Washington
Chehalis, Washington**

on behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

June 23, 2021

Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of this nation's nearly 4,000 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 COVID-19 pandemic, **I am requesting that Congress provide funding of \$105 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 serve as a superior court judge in Lewis County, Washington, where, for the entirety of my tenure as judge, I have presided over our county's treatment court programs, including drug courts. I have never participated in a more effective approach to promoting public health while also remaining steadfast to the promise of the justice system to protect public safety. Strong empirical evidence shows time after time that treatment courts not only reduce crime, but also save lives and families by connecting participants to evidence-based treatment services and recovery support.

Participants like Brant. Before coming to our program, he spent much of his life cycling in and out of the justice system because of an addiction that began in his early twenties. By the time he came to our program, he had been to jail seven times, with more on the horizon unless something changed. Our treatment court program provided the accountability and treatment that Brant needed to change.

In our program, Brant, like the rest of our participants, was assessed and given an individualized treatment plan designed by substance use treatment professionals using evidence-based methods, including medication-assisted treatment where appropriate. Together, in concert with the multidisciplinary treatment court team who ensured Brant received the services and accountability he needed to succeed, we set a goal of recovery for him, not another costly and ineffective stint behind bars.

Today, Brant is not only living that goal, he's doing what he can to help others achieve the same. He works for an organization that conducts outreach to vulnerable populations with substance use disorders and helps them get their lives back on track, with a special focus on homeless veterans. He also serves as the president of the nonprofit organization that helps support the Lewis County Drug Court, ensuring the lifesaving work of our program continues well into the future.

I have worked in treatment courts since 2004, when I helped launch Lewis County's adult drug court as chief criminal deputy in the prosecutor's office. Subsequently, as the chief criminal deputy of neighboring Thurston County, I supervised our adult drug court, mental health court, and veterans court units. Since then, I have watched many of the most helpless individuals in our justice system overcome their substance use or mental health disorder, regained their lives, and became productive citizens. Most go on to raise families, begin growing careers, and help others in the similar difficult positions they once found themselves in. Without hesitation, I credit the treatment court model for the health and safety of these individuals.

Lewis County is a rural, relatively quiet part of southwestern Washington. But we are not immune from the grips of the twin crises currently gripping the nation from coast to coast: 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 by expanding and enhancing 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%. 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.

Brant is not alone in his success. Treatment courts in this country have connected 1.5 million people who have lifesaving mental health and substance use disorders with treatment options best suited to them. Together, the court team offers the tools to overcome substance use disorder and past trauma to create meaningful, healthy relationships.

Continued support from the Drug Treatment Court 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 save lives and reunite families. But we know there are many more who still need this opportunity. I strongly urge this committee to recommend funding of \$105 million to the Drug Treatment Court Program in fiscal year 2022, so treatment courts in Washington and beyond can continue providing lifesaving substance use treatment services.