

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Outside Witness Testimony
Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

**Statement of Hon. Tina Nadeau
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Concord, New Hampshire**

On behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

May 25, 2022

Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of our country's nearly 4,000 treatment court programs and the 150,000 people they will connect to lifesaving addiction and mental health treatment this year alone. Given the ongoing substance use crisis, I am requesting that Congress provide funding of \$95 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$29 million for the Veterans Treatment Court Grant Program at the Department of Justice for fiscal year 2023.

I serve as Chief Justice of the New Hampshire Superior Court. In nearly two decades on the bench, I have never seen a program more effective than treatment courts, including drug courts and veterans treatment courts, at promoting public health while upholding the justice system's promise to protect public safety. Like many of my fellow judges, I felt frustrated by the limited options available in the traditional court model to change the behavior of offenders I was seeing in the court room repeatedly. When I began presiding over drug court in Rockingham County in 2006, I saw a new, more effective approach. Treatment court programs address the unique underlying conditions of each participant. Strong empirical evidence shows that treatment courts not only reduce crime, but also save lives and reunite families by connecting participants to evidence-based treatment services and recovery support. In my home state of New Hampshire, treatment court graduates have a 90% employment rate, and 78% of graduates do not reoffend within two years. New Hampshire treatment courts cost \$9 per day compared to \$84 per day it costs to incarcerate someone.

Just one of many success stories from New Hampshire is Nick, who was just 13 when his relationship with alcohol started. From there, he became more and more dependent on different substances. For a long time, he was able to hold down a job while trying to raise two children with his partner, who also struggled with addiction. But Nick's substance use caught up to him in 2012, when he was sent to prison for the first time. Nick said his time in prison hardened him, and instead of turning his life around, he just "learned new tricks" to keep up his old habits. After his first two years in prison, he turned to methamphetamine and heroin. He lost custody of his children and experienced homelessness and more stints in jail. Nick tried treatment but could not stay sober for long. When he came to treatment court, he was feeling hopeless and suicidal. The treatment court program provided both the accountability *and* the treatment he needed to change. In treatment court, Nick, like other participants, was assessed by a multidisciplinary team and

given an individualized treatment plan designed by substance use treatment professionals using evidence-based methods. Instead of being put behind bars, they set a goal of and path to long-term recovery and supervised him every step of the way. The treatment court team gave Nick a new understanding of his substance use disorder and a real desire for change. Drug court also gave him something else he'd been missing: hope. I'm happy to say that Nick has been in active recovery for years. He got his driver's license back, started his own carpentry business, and got engaged. Most importantly, he was reunited with his two children, of whom he now has full custody. He is proud to be a father and says he is now "someone who shows up, and who is responsible, peaceful, and kind."

Nick isn't alone in his success. Treatment courts have connected 1.5 million people struggling with substance use and mental health disorders with evidence-based treatment options, including medication for addiction treatment when appropriate, tailored to their specific needs. Together, the court team offers the tools to overcome substance use disorder and past trauma to create true recovery and healthy relationships.

I have seen hundreds of individuals in our justice system overcome their substance use or mental health disorders and became productive citizens in their communities. Most, like Nick, go on to start careers and raise families, and many now help others in the horrible position they were once in themselves. I can say for certain that the treatment court model deserves credit for the health and restored lives of these individuals. I can also say that New Hampshire, like many other states, is not immune to the deadly opioid epidemic. This crisis continues to bring to the fore the critical need to ensure all people, even those whose substance use leads to trouble with the law, have access to treatment, including medication for addiction treatment when appropriate. While there is no single solution to the opioid crisis, for individuals before the courts with a severe substance use or mental health disorder, treatment courts are a key solution to the crisis.

There is overwhelming empirical evidence that shows the effectiveness of treatment court programs. The Government Accountability Office finds the drug court model reduces crime by up to 58%. Further, the Department of Justice's Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation confirmed drug treatment courts significantly reduce both drug use and crime, while saving taxpayer money—an average of \$6,000 saved for every individual served. Other benefits include improved employment, financial stability, housing, and family reunification. Veterans treatment courts expand on the drug court model to include veteran justice outreach specialists from the Department of Veterans Affairs, volunteer veteran mentors from the community, and other local, state, and federal resources, and have proven equally effective. It is critical that we have interventions like veterans treatment court in place to ensure that when our heroes return home, if they do struggle, they have the treatment, structure, and support to transform their lives.

Continued support for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program at the Department of Justice ensures the nearly 4,000 treatment courts in the United States today provide critical services to those in need, while keeping communities safe. But we know there are many individuals who still need this opportunity. I strongly urge this subcommittee to recommend funding of \$95 million to the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$29 million to the Veterans Treatment Court Grant Program in fiscal year 2023 so treatment courts in New

Hampshire and across the country can continue to save lives, reunite families, and keep our communities healthy and safe.