

**U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
“FY 2013 Members and Outside Witness Hearing”**

**Testimony of Former Congressman Jim Ramstad, Senior Policy Advisor,  
National Association of Drug Court Professionals**

**March 22, 2012**

Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to once again have the honor of testifying before you on an issue that I believe is of the utmost importance to our country. According to the Conference of Chief Justices, Drug Courts are the most cost-effective and successful justice reform in our lifetime. An investment of \$40 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program at the Department of Justice (DOJ) will save upwards of \$134 million from avoided criminal justice and victimization costs alone and result in over \$1.1 billion in additional benefits to our economy.

Once again, the Administration has proposed combining funding for Drug Courts with an unauthorized ‘Problem-Solving Court’ initiative. The Administration is turning a blind eye to the evidence and I am gravely concerned about the short-term and long-term effects of diluting Drug Court funding. In FY’12 Congress had the wisdom and vision to provide dedicated Drug Court funding for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program so that our nation can continue to reap the substantial societal and economic benefits of this proven program. I wish to thank this committee for supporting \$40 million for Drug Courts in FY’12 and request that the Congress funds Drug Courts at a minimum of \$40 million at DOJ in FY’13.

It is no secret that this issue is close to my heart. For two decades in Congress I fought hard to end discrimination against those suffering from mental illness and chemical addiction. During that time, I had the privilege of working closely with many of you. Drug Courts were initially authorized during my first term on the House Judiciary Committee, and Former Congressman Patrick Kennedy and I founded the Addiction, Treatment, and Recovery Caucus. With the support of many of you on this Subcommittee, we passed the Mental Health and Chemical Addiction Treatment Equity Act, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2008. This law has already increased access to treatment. I am here today to talk about another justice reform that deserves your continuing support.

**The Federal Role**

As I have previously stated, Drug abuse is a national security issue directly impacting every facet of society. From the economy, to border security, to the safety of our neighborhoods, drug abuse drains federal, state, and local resources and places an unjust burden on all law-abiding citizens. For over five decades, Congress has legislated a national response and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has consistently called for cohesive and central oversight over drug enforcement and demand reduction efforts.

Until the demand for drugs is eliminated, drugs will remain a national concern necessitating a shared responsibility between federal, state and local governments. This shared responsibility is evidenced by our national strategies to protect our borders, stop prescription drug abuse and trafficking, reduce victimization, and execute evidence-based demand reduction strategies such as Drug Courts.

There is simply no way for the States, acting individually or in concert, to approach this level of coordination and sophistication in training and technical assistance. The economies-of-scale and capacity to amass national expertise through federal support cannot be matched in a piecemeal state-by-state approach. Only through a combination of state and federal funding will Drug Courts remain the most successful criminal justice strategy in our nation's history. Federal funding not only ensures program success, but provides the training and development of long-term state and community funding strategies.

### **A Proven Budget Solution**

From an investment perspective, Drug Courts are the equivalent of a "blue-chip stock" that can be confidently relied upon to produce sustained and predictable returns on investment.

Congress has traditionally seen Drug Courts as a budget solution and has continually made the investment to ensure their growth and sustainability. As states seek a solution for overburdened budgets and overcrowded prisons, Governors are looking to Drug Courts as a program that provides across-the-board results and immediate savings for taxpayers. In Georgia, Governor Nathan Deal is investing \$10 million in the expansion of Drug Courts throughout the state. In Michigan, Governor Rick Snyder just announced a plan to reduce crime in four of the nation's most violent cities by investing in Drug Courts. And in New Jersey, Governor Chris Christie is expanding Drug Courts to serve every non-violent, drug-addicted offender in the state. Continued Federal investments in Drug Courts, coupled with state-led initiatives, are the first step toward serving the 1.2 million individuals in the criminal justice system identified by the Department of Justice as being eligible for Drug Court but unable to gain access. Expanding Drug Courts to reach these 1.2 million individuals will save over \$30 billion annually.

The staggering monetary returns produced by Drug Courts are backed by rigorous scientific studies. Using advanced statistical procedure called Meta-analysis, the Urban institute concluded that Drug Courts produce an average of \$2.21 in direct benefits to the criminal justice system for every \$1 invested — a 221% return on investment. When Drug Courts targeted their services to the more serious, higher-risk drug offenders, the average return on investment was determined to be even higher: \$3.36 for every \$1 invested.

These cost savings are *not* hypothetical, contingent or remote. They reflect verifiable, measurable cost-offsets to the criminal justice system stemming from reductions in re-arrests, law enforcement contacts, court hearings, and jail or prison beds. Moreover, the financial

benefits found in the study were realized within the same or immediately ensuing calendar year in which the initial expenditures were made.

When other indirect cost-offsets to the community were taken into account — such as savings from reduced foster care placements and healthcare service utilization — studies have reported economic benefits ranging from approximately \$2 to \$27 for every \$1 invested. The net result has been economic benefits to local communities ranging from approximately \$3,000 to \$13,000 per drug court participant.

Given the abysmal outcomes of incarceration on addictive behavior, there's absolutely no justification for governments to continue to waste our tax dollars feeding a situation where generational recidivism has become the norm and parents, children and grandparents are finding themselves locked up together.

### **A Proven Public Safety Solution**

Today, over 2,600 communities have found a solution in Drug Court. A compelling reason behind this unprecedented expansion is that Drug Courts work better than incarceration or treatment alone. Drug Courts reduce substance abuse and crime more effectively and at less expense than any other justice strategy.

Late last year the GAO released its fourth report on Drug Courts, concluding once again that Drug Courts reduce recidivism and cut crime. The report validated existing research by examining over 30 scientifically rigorous studies involving more than 50 Drug Courts nationwide. Of the 32 programs reviewed, 31 showed reductions in recidivism. Drug Court participants were found to have up to a 26 percent lower rate of recidivism than comparison groups. Re-arrest rates for Drug Court graduates were found to be up to 58 percent below comparison groups.

The GAO included in its research review the National Institute of Justice's National Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation (MADCE), which it called "the most comprehensive study on Drug Courts to date." This five-year study found that Drug Courts not only significantly reduce recidivism and drug use, but also increase employment, education, family functioning and financial stability.

### **Conclusion**

Now more than ever we must focus on proven programs that guarantee financial returns and measurable success. There is simply no better investment this Congress can make than Drug Courts. Drug Courts have been proven through rigorous scientific research to decrease crime, save taxpayer dollars, rehabilitate offenders, and restore families and communities. No other criminal justice or behavioral healthcare program has comparable evidence of success. Where the Federal government led the charge, state and localities have picked up the mantle and continued the work seamlessly. One would be hard pressed to identify another federal program

that has been as avidly endorsed and sustained by States and local counties. Supported by policy analysts on both ends of the political spectrum, Drug Courts offer a roadmap for a practical, evidence-based and fiscally conservative federal drug policy.

I strongly urge an investment of \$40 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program at DOJ.