

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

Outside Witness Testimony

Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations
Statement of Brant Byrd, graduate of Lewis County, Washington, Drug Court
Chehalis, Washington

On behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals
requesting funding for the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration
May 5, 2022

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 1.5 million graduates of treatment court programs and the 150,000 people treatment court programs will connect to lifesaving substance use and mental health treatment this year alone. Given the ongoing substance use crisis, 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 2023.

I am writing to you today as a husband, employee, taxpayer, and grateful drug court graduate. Before coming to the Lewis County Drug Court program, I spent much of my life cycling in and out of the justice system for crimes fueled by addiction. I went to jail seven times—and that doesn't encompass the many times I *wasn't* caught breaking and entering, stealing, and causing general harm to my community doing anything to support my addiction. I had also been to treatment multiple times, but without accountability, I'd never truly had the chance to heal from the trauma of my past, and I was never able to sustain my recovery. I often wonder what might have happened if there were no drug court available to me.

The multidisciplinary treatment court team, which includes case managers, treatment providers, and counselors, not only looked at the facts of my case, but they also looked at my entire criminal history, my addiction history, and my life experiences up to that point. They created a plan to ensure I received the treatment and social services I needed, while still holding me accountable for my actions and the requirements of the program. Receiving treatment for my addiction was only part of the process. Because sustained, long-term recovery is the goal, drug court helped me work on myself from the inside out, addressing issues that had been impacting my behavior since I was a child.

I completed the program in 2016, and I have dedicated myself to repairing the damage I caused by giving to others what was given to me. I first worked for an organization that conducts outreach to vulnerable populations with substance use disorders and helps them get their lives back on track. I also became 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.

In February of this year, I had to step down as president of that organization, but for good reason—I became the community outreach worker at the very same drug court that changed my life. The

treatment court team is like a family, and I work every day alongside my fellow team members to ensure our participants are connected to the services and treatment they need to turn their lives around the way I did. And while I'm no longer president, I'm still a proud and active member of the nonprofit organization full of graduates like me. And taking "family" one step further, I recently married my wife.

I am proof that 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.

But don't just take my word for it; there is overwhelming empirical evidence showing the effectiveness of these programs. The Government Accountability Office has concluded 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, and financial stability, as well as reduced foster care placements.

I am not alone in my success. This year, treatment courts will connect 150,000 people who have 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. 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 as our country continues to battle the ongoing opioid crisis, we know there are many more people 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 2023, so treatment courts in Washington and beyond can continue providing substance use treatment that allows people to heal from the inside out.