

**U.S. Senate, Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government**

**Testimony of Hon. William “Rusty” Knight  
Judge, 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit of Louisiana  
May 24, 2019**

Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Coons and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of this nation’s over 3,000 drug courts and the 150,000 people they will connect to life-saving addiction and mental health treatment this year. **I am giving my support to continued funding for the drug court training and technical assistance grant program (Pub. L. 115-271) at the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President.**

In my community in St. Tammany and Washington parishes, drug courts are on the front lines of stopping the revolving door of drug use and crime so many find themselves. Drug courts are an alternative to incarceration using the justice system to connect those charged with crimes in service to their addiction with treatment and other services so they can live a healthy, productive and crime-free life.

I am privileged to preside over one of seven treatment courts in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District. I oversee the re-entry court program that provides a drug court program to participants after serving time in state prison. In our re-entry court, participants serve two to three years in Angola State Prison or Louisiana Correctional Institution for Women before they enter my drug court program for another eighteen to thirty months. This program is helping those who have received multiple felonies because of their addiction find a life of long-term recovery and return to their communities as productive, tax-paying citizens who are reengaged with their families and neighborhoods.

In the 30-year history of drug courts, the body of evidence showing the effectiveness of the program continues to grow. Recognizing this, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals released the *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards*, representing more than a quarter-century of empirical study on addiction, pharmacology, behavioral health and criminal justice. The authorized training and technical assistance grant for drug courts at ONDCP provides education to courts across the country using NADCP’s standards.

With the nation in the grips of an unprecedented opioid epidemic, now, more than ever before, this training and technical assistance program is needed to educate drug courts on critical issues. Issues such as medication-assisted treatment and overdose prevention, as well as finding creative ways to increase the census of drug courts to ensure they serve those at the highest risk to recidivate and have the highest need for treatment services.

Drug courts are the most researched intervention in the history of the American justice system, so my treatment court team takes part in regular training and technical assistance to ensure we meet the rigorous evidence-based standards proven to increase positive outcomes. We receive critical training at the statewide, national levels that proves critical to serving the unique needs of the veterans in our program. The training we receive greatly helps to fine-tune our program and ensure the best possible outcomes.

Those outcomes go beyond just the participants my program, they also have an undeniable reaching effect on their entire families, breaking the generational cycle of substance use disorder.

Take for example John and Bernard, two brothers in my program three years apart in age. The two grew up doing everything together, including drugs and alcohol. Their years of substance use together also led them to crime and getting arrested together. You would think that with three felony convictions each and some time in prison, the future for these brothers looked grim. But they both chose to participate in the re-entry drug court program, making their transition back to society more productive and forward thinking.

Bernard received his auto mechanic certification while serving his time in prison and, after his release into the re-entry drug court program, gained employment at an auto dealer. Now he is married with two children and a career he enjoys. John, meanwhile, received his certification in small-engine repair and obtained a job with the Stihl dealership while in the re-entry drug court program. It wasn't long before the John Deere dealership up the road poached him for an even higher-level job. John now owns his own home, his own car and enjoys his career.

John and Bernard still spend time together, but now it is on family vacations and visiting relatives in neighboring states. Even more spectacular, because their father worked hard and because we believed in his promise, Bernard's children will grow up in a family free of addiction and crime.

Supporting training and technical assistance for drug courts at ONDCP is critical to ensuring these programs continue to provide the care and effectiveness taxpayers, not only in my parishes, but around the country have come to expect from drug courts. Without it, citizens like John and Bernard would never have earned a second chance to make their communities proud. Thank you.