

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Outside Witness Testimony
Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

Statement of Bridget Smith
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin

On behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals
May 11, 2023

Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to have the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of more than 4,000 treatment court programs around the country, 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 \$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 2024.

My name is Bridget Smith, and I am a lawyer representing law enforcement and other first responders in Wisconsin, and the founder of a non-profit serving my community. I am also a person in recovery from addiction and a proud treatment court graduate.

My life today is dedicated to service and giving back to my community. My career is dedicated to advocating for law enforcement as a labor attorney. I am grateful for the life I have today which did not seem possible years ago when I was in active addiction. My alcohol and drug use began in high school. I was able to keep the severity of my use hidden for a while, but eventually, it began to take control of my life. I was fortunate to have the support of my family who helped me seek treatment several times. For a period, I was well enough to attend college, but I found I could not stay in recovery and soon I was in crisis. When my family showed up to attend my college graduation, I was sitting in jail.

In 2012, I was accepted into drug court in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I did well in the program, and even started a non-profit to support drug court alumni and participants before I graduated in 2013. This is where my story may differ from others you have heard. A year after graduating, I fell in with my old crowd, and my old habits crept back into my life. I started using again. But my time in drug court gave me a glimpse of the life I wanted to live—I knew I could be happy, sober and a productive member of society. During my time in drug court, I also found a community of people who cared about me. My friends from the non-profit, who were also participants or graduates of drug court, saw I was in trouble and reached out to offer support. During my first time in drug court, I had proven to myself that I could live in recovery, I just

needed a little more help. And this time, thanks to the reliable friends I made while in drug court, I was able to recognize it.

They say drug court never gives up on people, and I am living proof of that. My relapse led, once again, to arrest, but I was offered a second chance at drug court, this time in Waukesha County, Wisconsin. I never looked back. My second time around, I didn't have to start from scratch. I had a foundation upon which I rebuilt my recovery. I was not going to make the same mistakes this time around. The structure, accountability, and treatment provided the perfect combination for me to begin rebuilding my life as a person in recovery.

While I was in drug court, I was inspired by the way the team supported every participant, particularly my public defender whom I credit with saving my life. I wanted to help others the way my public defender helped me, and I decided to go to law school. I began studying for the LSAT before I even graduated from drug court. With the team's help and encouragement, I applied and was accepted to Marquette University Law School.

Today, nearly ten years later, I am an attorney representing first responders. I am reconnected with my family. I am back to being part of a recovery community that supports each other. I am back working with the non-profit I helped start. I have seen how treatment courts transform lives, and I am here because I believe everyone should have the opportunity I had. Thank you for supporting treatment courts and the millions of people like me living in recovery because of these programs.

I am just one example of how funding treatment courts, like drug courts and veterans treatment courts, not only helps individuals, but uplifts an entire community. These courts are vitally important as our nation continues to battle the addiction crisis and its impact on communities nationwide. The multidisciplinary treatment court team, including the judge, attorneys, case managers, treatment providers, counselors, and others, collaborate to develop a unique plan for each participant according to their specific needs. From medication for addiction treatment, to counseling, to therapy and more, participants are given the treatment and support they need to get, and stay, on track in recovery. Investment in these programs helps state and local leaders increase their capacity to address the crisis, helping thousands of individuals find recovery. This treatment court funding will help strengthen communities across our nation.

I strongly urge this committee to recommend 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 2024, so these programs can continue to help people break cycles of addiction, find long-term recovery, and, like me, become healthy members of their communities.