

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

FY 2024 Public Witness Testimony

Statement of Daniel Oldham, treatment court graduate, Alabama

On behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

March 22, 2023

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, 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 the programs will connect to lifesaving addiction and mental health treatment this year. Given the ongoing substance use crisis, I request that Congress provide \$105 million, for the Drug Treatment Court Program at the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for fiscal year 2024.

This program is vitally important as the nation continues to battle the substance use disorder crisis and its devastating impacts on communities like mine around the country. Investment in this evidence-based program is needed to help state and local leaders increase their capacity. Funding at this level means thousands of individuals will receive the lifesaving services provided by drug courts, break the cycle of crime and addiction, begin a life in recovery, reunite with their families, and join me in giving back to their community.

My name is Daniel Oldham. I am a proud husband, father, small business owner, and SAMHSA certified peer recovery specialist. I am a person of faith and purpose. I am also a grateful drug court graduate who will celebrate five years in recovery next month.

My life today looks nothing like it did for the 28 years I was in active addiction. I was born into an addicted family. It robbed me of both my mom and my dad. I started using prescription drugs at a young age. Today, I understand that I was trying to cope with my trauma, but back then all I knew was the desire to use. Like so many others, eventually I lost control. In those 28 years I lost everything a hundred times over. By age 38, I had been in and out of courts and jails for years. I was sick and alone. I saw no future for myself.

I never expected to find support in a courtroom but that is exactly what happened. In 2017, I was charged with a felony, but instead of going to prison, I was offered the chance to participate in the Drug Court in Shelby County, Alabama. It saved my life.

Drug court held me accountable in a way no one ever had. But at the same time, they also showed me incredible support and encouragement. It was hard at first. If I am being honest the first few weeks, I pushed back on them. But the team never gave up on me. They understood that everyone has their own path to recovery. For me that meant helping me find a faith-based treatment provider. Pretty soon, I began to embrace the program and my recovery.

About six months into the program, I met with the team to discuss the future. I had seen so many young people around the courthouse who were just as lost and broken as I had been. I worried

about what would happen to them and wondered how I could help. I told the drug court team that I wanted to be a peer support specialist. I thought they'd say no or that I wasn't ready, but they told me they believed in me and encouraged me to pursue it. The court team asked me to launch their newly developed peer support program within the drug court program, and I was happy to accept that offer.

I graduated from drug court on October 18, 2019. In 2021 I returned to that same courtroom and saw Judge Joiner and the team, however, this time, I was walking in as a SAMHSA-certified peer recovery support specialist to begin working with the drug court participants. I was now part of the same team that saved my life. I got to work alongside amazing people, and I've seen even more ways that everyone, from the judge to the police officers, really care. For more than 20 years the Shelby County drug courts has helped more than 2,300 individuals like myself begin a life in recovery and served as a model as Alabama expanded drug courts statewide

The recovery that drug court helped me achieve has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. It helped me connect more deeply with my faith. And it put me in a position to help others rise above addiction just as I have.

I thank all of you because when you support treatment courts you support me, and thousands like me, who are ready to give back but just need a helping hand.

Support from the Drug Treatment Court Program at SAMHSA has helped hundreds of courts over the years provide critical treatment services to save lives, reunite families, and restore

communities. The largest and most comprehensive independent multisite study to date found that drug courts reduce crime by up to 58% and save, on average, up to \$6,000 per participant. Additional benefits were found to include increases in employment, education, family functioning, and financial stability.

Chairman Aderholt, as you know, Alabama is just one of many states across our country that continues to battle the ongoing substance use disorder epidemic; there are many more people who still need the opportunity that drug court offers. I thank you for your incredible support of drug courts here in Congress.

I strongly urge this committee to recommend \$105 million to the Drug Treatment Court Program for fiscal year 2024 so these programs can continue providing treatment that allows people to break the cycle of substance use, and become active, healthy members of their own communities.