

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Outside Witness Testimony
Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

Statement of Pricilla Matos
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Nashua, New Hampshire

On behalf of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

May 8, 2023

Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, 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 level funding of \$95 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$35 million for the Veterans Treatment Court Grant Program at the Department of Justice for fiscal year 2024.

My name is Pricilla Matos and I am a loving daughter, certified recovery support specialist, program manager at a recovery center, and the lead peer specialist for a treatment court program. I am also a proud graduate of the Hillsborough South Adult Drug Treatment Court program in New Hampshire and will celebrate six years in recovery this summer.

Prior to entering drug court in 2017, my life looked very different. I started using drugs at the age of 13. My addiction quickly escalated, and I found myself using whatever drugs were around and available to me. By the time I reached my twenties, addiction had taken over my life. I began selling drugs to feed my addiction. In 2015, I received my first charges for selling, and soon after, received my second charge for selling. By the time I entered drug court, I had nine felonies.

Drug court would end up saving my life, but in the beginning, it was not easy. I had never attended a treatment program before, and it was all new to me. The structure and accountability the court required, combined with treatment, were overwhelming, and I resisted the program. For a while, I was going through the motions to get it over with. I soon learned the drug court team was well trained to respond to this behavior. They made it clear they would never give up on me, but that I needed to engage or there would be sanctions. Soon, I started seeing the positive effects of drug court, and began to get things back in my life that mattered. I started enjoying life's little pleasures—like bird watching. My relationship with myself, and others, started to improve. Most importantly, my relationship with my mom started improving. She became my biggest cheerleader and drove me to my treatment and court appointments.

The drug court team encouraged me to get involved with the local recovery center, Revive. I began volunteering, and after I graduated from drug court in 2017, I joined the

AmeriCorps Recovery Corps. I am the program manager at Revive Recovery Center and working toward my certification in recovery support worker (CRSW). I am also the lead peer recovery support specialist with the same drug court team that saved my life. I am grateful to the drug court program for helping me find my purpose. I enjoy helping others and giving them a path through some of the same struggles that I went through to find recovery. My relationships continue to give me hope, and in turn, to share that hope with others. Who would have thought that I would be such an active participant in my community, and that I would find hope and joy in relationships again? I even have weekly discussions with my former probation officer about our mutual love of bird watching!

I am just one example of how funding treatment courts, like drug courts and veterans treatment courts, not only helps individuals, but uplifts a whole community. Drug courts offer a ripple effect of hope. Support from the Department of Justice has helped start and expand thousands of courts over the years, while ensuring they follow evidence-based standards that ensure fidelity to the proper model. 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.

Drug courts and veterans treatment courts are vitally important as our nation continues to battle the addiction crisis and its impact on communities like mine around the country. Investment in these programs helps state and local leaders increase their capacity to address the crisis from a public safety and public health standpoint. This funding will help thousands of individuals break the cycle of crime and addiction and begin a life in recovery.

I strongly urge this committee to recommend \$95 million for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program and \$35 million for the Veterans Treatment Court Grant Program at the Department of Justice 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.