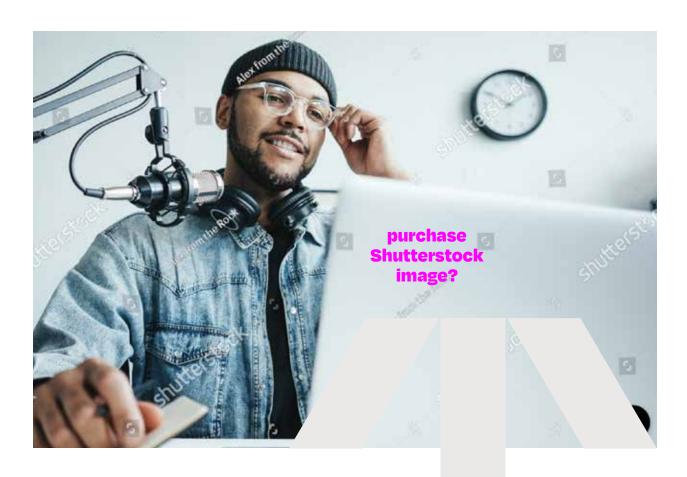
Media Guide for Treatment Courts

Developing Your Message and Sharing Your Success



Introduction

It has never been more important for treatment courts to tell the stories of their success. After all, these stories help ensure continued funding and community support that will save more lives, reunite more families, and strengthen more communities. But working with the media can be daunting, and it can be challenging to know where to begin. All Rise has developed this publication to help treatment courts confidently and effectively engage with the media.



Understanding the Media Landscape

The news media can impact how the public, decision makers, policy makers, and others view and support treatment courts.

The media landscape is changing rapidly, and it is important to recognize that the media increasingly offers a combination of information and entertainment—all at a frenetic pace. And thanks to our smartphones, we can consume news at any time of day. Due to this lightning-fast marketplace, the media has a constant need for content. This appetite for stories provides opportunities for treatment courts with compelling stories to talk about their lifesaving work.

The internet has also become the great equalizer. In the past, a small weekly newspaper might reach only 2,000 people. Now a story in that local newspaper, published online and shared on social media, can reach millions, as many as or more than a nationally broadcast television news story.

News stories today are succinct. Printed news stories are often as few as 600 to 800 words or even less. Longer-form journalism, with feature stories of 1,000 to 2,000 words or more, is not as common, but online platforms have given these stories a new lease on life, since they aren't restricted by the size of the printed page. Many television broadcast news stories average less than two minutes, and online stories are often chopped into digestible news nuggets.

Can you say everything you want to say about treatment courts in two minutes or less?
Or in a 10-second sound bite? And convey context, details, or empathy? It can be done,

but excellent storytelling is required. This guide is designed to help you be a confident, well-informed, and engaging storyteller who knows how to pitch to reporters and convey a powerful message.

The Power of Stories

Human beings are hard-wired to respond to compelling storytelling. This is good news, because treatment courts are full of amazing stories—from stories of individual transformation to justice and treatment system innovation to collaboration and unique community partnerships. All treatment courts have great stories to tell.

A good story does more than inform or amplify; it creates emotional resonance with the audience. A great story accomplishes this while stimulating the desire to get involved.

What makes an effective treatment court story?

Character: Because most media stories are brief, they generally focus on one compelling individual who serves as the "main character." This person must be credible, honest, and sincere. Treatment court stories often focus on a graduate, someone who has been living securely in recovery and is able to reflect on and talk about their experiences clearly and succinctly. But the main character can also be a member of the team, the treatment court

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judge, or a staff member talking about the program and how they see it change lives or what they hope to accomplish. The main character does not take away from the many other individuals involved in a treatment court's success; instead, they amplify the work of the team and demonstrate the collective success of all involved.

Immersion: A good story offers enough details to help the viewer or reader not only understand the issue being discussed but, more importantly, feel something. Sympathy, empathy, frustration, joy—immersive stories move their audience. This does not mean that stories of recovery must go into every detail of a person's past; it means that we, as authors or purveyors of stories, should be intentional, selective, and descriptive. As we'll discuss later in this guide, effective messaging is key.

Context: It's important to connect our stories to the bigger picture. A story of treatment court success becomes even more profound when presented in the context of the larger addiction epidemic; a story about family reunification is heightened with more understanding of the impact of children losing their parents to incarceration or the overburdened foster care system. Context can be added with numbers or statistics, research study anecdotes, or a quote from All Rise.

Call to action: How do we make a good story great? Give the audience something to do with the emotion it generates. Calls to action may be specific or general, but they are important because they engage the audience more deeply. Specific calls to action may be to ask the public to contact elected officials and support funding, or to donate food to a holiday event. More general calls to action can simply

lead the audience to consider how they might help or broaden their perspective on what it means for justice to be served.

Imagine a graduate telling their story in an interview following their graduation. They detail their journey and transformation, surrounded by their children. "Treatment court saved my life. Not only that, it saved my family." On its own, this story carries emotional weight. But they are not done! "As I stand here today, I can't help but think about the families out there that still need help. We must make sure that treatment court is available to save their lives, too." This simple call to action is not specific, but it gives the audience an idea to latch onto the next time they hear about potential budget cuts to treatment programs, social services, or the courts.

Messaging 101: What Is a Treatment Court?

When planning for a media event or an interview, it is important to consider the audience you wish to reach and to develop messaging specific to that audience.

What is a treatment court? This is arguably the most common question we get asked, and while it seems simple, it can be difficult to answer. This is because there is no one way to talk about treatment courts! How you define your treatment court is going to depend on the context in which the question is asked and the audience you are trying to reach.

For example, some audiences may prefer to hear about money and resources saved, reductions

in crime, and evidence-based practices. Others might respond more to messages about saving lives, or helping young people correct course for a healthy future. You know your community best; think through how you can convey the important work of your program in the most impactful way possible.

Consider the three descriptions of a treatment court below. They all describe what a treatment court does, but they do so by emphasizing different messaging points that appeal to specific audiences.

Example 1: In treatment court, treatment providers ensure that individuals with substance use and mental health disorders receive an individualized, evidence-based treatment plan and work as a team with law enforcement, probation, defense, prosecution, and the judge to hold participants accountable and provide ongoing support. Together, we save lives, reunite families, and make the community safer.

Example 2: Our treatment court is an accountability court. We use a combination of close supervision and rigorous treatment to hold participants accountable for their actions and help them be productive members of the community. Our program saves \$13,000 for every person we serve, money that can go to help law enforcement focus on violent crime.

Example 3: Every family has been impacted by addiction. In treatment court, instead of simply punishing people with substance use and mental health disorders, we offer evidence-based treatment and recovery support. This combination of accountability and

compassion has proven to transform lives and make the community safer.

Take some time to develop several ways of defining your program based on the messages that resonate most in your community. As you develop your messaging, think about these four questions:

- Whom do treatment courts serve?
- How do treatment courts help?
- Why is this approach effective?
- What makes your program special?

Identify a couple of stories that highlight the work you do. And practice with the individuals most likely to speak to the press so they are comfortable with the message.

Audiences

- Funders
- Skeptics
- General public
- Colleagues
- Legislators
- Stakeholders
- Recovery community
- Communities impacted by substance use/mental health/justice involvement

Messages

- Lower recidivism
- Restore communities
- Reduce crime and make communities safer
- Save money
- Restore families
- Address the opioid epidemic
- More taxpaying citizens in the workforce
- Send people back to school
- Improve public health
- Ensure public safety

Working With the Media

Identify Your Local News Media

How do you find the local news media? You may be able to access media lists through your local or county public information office. This is often a good place to start. If you need to build your own list, begin by looking around your community. Is there a local newspaper, radio station, television station, or other news outlet? Larger cities will have more news coverage than smaller ones. Suburbs of big cities will often be covered by news stations anchored in a metropolitan area. If you aren't sure where to start, conduct an internet search to look up news media for your town, city, or county.

- Create a list of local news outlets, including their address, phone number for the news desk or metro desk, and any email addresses listed to receive press releases or media advisories.
- 2. Do a search on the outlet's website to see if they have any past coverage of treatment courts or related issues (e.g., justice innovation, the impact of substance use and mental health disorders on communities and/or the justice system). If you have a veterans treatment court, impaired driving treatment court, or family treatment court, look for stories about veterans, impaired driving, or foster care, and try to identify reporters who might find your program of interest. Add the reporters who wrote these stories to the list, in addition to the news desks.

3. Review your spreadsheet and update the email addresses and phone numbers regularly by checking outlet websites once every three months for staffing changes. As you work with reporters, you will probably add names and contact information to your media list.

A Note on Social Media

Some communities are so small that most of the news comes from popular social media accounts or online forums. While these can be outlets to spread your message, do so with caution. Although newsrooms generally follow journalistic ethics, the same does not apply to "citizen reporters." Online forums can tend to generate negativity in comments that may bring unwanted scrutiny.

Invite the Media to Cover Your Program

How you approach the media about covering a story can vary depending on the kind of story you are trying to offer. Some stories are event specific: a graduation ceremony, the 100th graduate of your court, National Treatment Court Month, or the opening of a new treatment court program. Some stories are topic specific: an in-depth profile of a graduate, an interview with the judge to talk about treatment courts and the justice system, or a story about new technology being used in a treatment court program. No matter what kind of story you want to tell, each may require its own unique approach.

Type of Event	Whom to Invite	What to Send	How to Reach Out
Treatment court graduation ceremony	Newspapers, radio, television	Basic media advisory; mention availability of interview subjects and existing film or video content	Send to all assignment desks and contacts
Holiday lunch for treatment court graduates and their families	Newspapers, radio, television	Basic media advisory; mention availability of interview subjects and existing film or video content	Send to all assignment desks and contacts
Profile of a treatment court graduate	Pick one news outlet to target for the profile, and identify a reporter to approach	Draft a one- or two- paragraph pitch showcasing key story elements	Send to one reporter, wait for response, and if no, send to another
Judge and staff reflect on treatment court anniversary, share vision for court's future	Pick one news outlet to target, and identify a reporter to approach	Draft a one- or two- paragraph pitch showcasing key story elements	Send to one reporter, wait for response, and if no, send to another

Make the Pitch

Pitching gets your story to someone at a media outlet who can decide on coverage. If you are focusing on one outlet or reporter for a story, you'll use a direct pitch. If you are trying to reach several outlets to cover an event, you'll use a media advisory. Samples of both are below and should be sent in the body of an email, not as an attachment.

The elements of a pitch include:

 Hook: Link your pitch to a recent news story or recent coverage by the reporter. Help them understand the relevance by giving some brief context.

- **Timing:** If a reporter likes a story, they will do their own pitch to their editors. This takes time. Be sure to pitch well in advance and, if about a specific event, provide clear dates.
- Available resources: The more you can prepackage the story, the better. Let them know who will be available for an interview and what assets you may have that will create a compelling, well-rounded story.

In each case, you will need to be persistent and follow up any emails with a phone call.

Sample Direct Pitch

Dear XYZ,

I read your recent story about an increase in impaired driving in our community and wanted to reach out with a unique and timely story that I think you'll find compelling. When Robert Smith came before the judge at our impaired driving treatment court, he was afraid he would be sent to prison for years. Instead, Judge Taylor looked beyond Robert's crimes and recognized a potential need to address an underlying substance use disorder. Judge Taylor and his team connected Robert with clinical screening and assessment, followed by substance use disorder treatment; they also provided recovery support, supervision, and accountability

services; over time, they watched him earn back the trust of his community and, most importantly, the love and trust of his 5-year-old daughter. Now Robert mentors others struggling with addiction who are coming through the same treatment court. A profile of Robert will help readers understand that while impaired driving is a critical issue, there are solutions in our community that are making a difference.

Robert and Judge Taylor are both available for interviews. Footage of Robert's graduation from treatment court is also available. Thanks for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sample Media Advisory

[Your treatment court] to Celebrate National Treatment Court Month With Special Graduation Ceremony; [Name] Will Deliver Keynote Address

[CITY, STATE, DATE]—In celebration of National Treatment Court Month, the [treatment court] will hold a [graduation ceremony/ event] on [date] at [location]. [Name (judge, member of Congress, etc.)] will deliver the keynote address. The event will recognize [#] individuals whose lives have been transformed by the treatment and support provided by the program. Media are invited to attend, with interviews available upon request. To RSVP please contact [contact information].

What: National Treatment Court Month Celebration

When: [Date, time]
Where: [Location]

Why: Treatment courts across the nation are holding special events to celebrate National Treatment Court Month. Treatment courts are considered the most effective strategy for reducing addiction, crime, and recidivism

while saving taxpayer dollars.

With their friends and families in attendance, this graduation will honor men and women who have completed an intensive program of comprehensive substance use disorder treatment, close supervision, and accountability.

[If you have information on a few graduates willing to share their story, include three to five sentences on each here.]

National Treatment Court Month is coordinated by the national nonprofit All Rise. In recognition, treatment courts throughout the nation are celebrating the most successful justice intervention in our nation's history. Our uplifting graduation is evidence of the tremendous impact the [treatment court] has had on our community and will send a powerful message that these programs are vital to the health and well-being of our state.

There are more than 4,000 treatment courts in the United States, serving 150,000 people annually. Learn more at AllRise.org.

Contact: Name, phone number, email address ####

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

Writing an opinion editorial (op-ed) or a letter to the editor is one way to share your message and advocate for treatment courts. An op-ed is generally longer and tackles a relevant issue in the community. A letter to the editor is shorter and written in response to a published article. It's important to follow the newspaper's word count requirements and submission guidelines, which are typically listed online.

Monitor the news. Monitoring the news will give you a feel for the types of stories reporters are looking for, and which reporters are writing about your issue. It is also a great way to look for story ideas. If a news outlet runs a story about an increase in drug overdoses or impaired driving, it will generally welcome a pitch, op-ed, or letter to the editor from your program offering a solution.

Find a news hook. National Treatment Court Month, held each May, gives you an opportunity to talk about treatment courts. Other important calendar-based hooks include:

- September Recovery Month
- November 11 Veterans Day
- December Impaired Driving Prevention Month

Know the word limit. Newspapers have limited space, and editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 600 to 800 words will work for an op-ed, but check the paper's op-ed page to find out their preference. Letters to the editor are often under 300 words, and many outlets even request that letters be under 200 words.

Stick to a single point. Make one point clearly and persuasively. "Humanize" your op-ed. Illustrations, anecdotes, and personal stories help explain and bring complicated issues to life. Think about your personal experiences in treatment court and use them in the op-ed. Make a specific recommendation.

These are opinion pieces. State your opinion on what is needed to ensure that your treatment court can continue to operate effectively.

Draw the reader in and get to the point.

Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument. If you choose to open with an anecdote or other device, make sure you quickly get to the point.

End with a bang. Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.

Sample Op-Ed

All Rise: Treatment courts save lives and strengthen communities

For three decades, there has been a growing movement to transform the way the justice system responds to individuals with substance use and mental health disorders. Rather than continuing the revolving door of addiction and related crime, treatment courts break the cycle by holding individuals accountable while connecting them with the treatment and support needed to change their lives. This approach is no longer an experiment; approximately 4,000 treatment courts across the nation have proven to be the most successful justice intervention in our nation's history, helping not just individuals but their families and communities find hope, healing, and recovery. These programs are a place where when one person rises, we all rise.

Each May, All Rise hosts National Treatment Court Month to shed light on how this approach is saving lives and making our community safer.

Here in [location], we offer [name treatment court types]. Treatment courts like ours differ from traditional court because we invite treatment providers and other public health professionals to be a part of the team. They ensure that each person in our program receives an individualized, evidence-based treatment plan, and work together with the judge, defense attorneys, prosecutors, probation, and law enforcement to provide ongoing support and accountability. This approach allows our treatment court to identify and meet individual needs beyond clinical treatment, such as education, employment, housing assistance, family reunification, restitution, and healthcare.

[Insert a brief graduate success story. Example: Several years ago, a young woman entered our treatment court. After years of struggling with a substance use disorder, she resorted to stealing to support her addiction. She was arrested numerous times, but nothing changed. She was facing years in prison when she got the chance to participate in our program, where she met regularly with a case manager and received rigorous treatment and counseling. With the help of the court team, she began to put her life back together. While in the program, we helped her enroll in college and find a job. She completed the treatment court program and went on to get her bachelor's degree and reconnect with her family. Today, she has no criminal record holding her back. She is happy, healthy, employed, and contributing to our community.]

This story is just one powerful reminder that when one person rises out of addiction and finds recovery, we all rise. And it is just one of the thousands of individual stories that demonstrate why treatment courts are so critical in the effort to address addiction and related crime. The research agrees: Numerous studies have found that treatment courts reduce crime and drug use and save money. These programs also improve education, employment, housing, financial stability, and family reunification, which reduces foster care placements. Treatment courts represent a compassionate approach to the devastation of addiction. This year's National Treatment Court Month celebration should signal that the time has come to reap the economic and societal benefits of expanding this proven solution to all in need.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Drug court diversion is of great help in the opioid crisis

As a West Virginian and a substance use disorder clinician with more than 11 years in recovery, I read with interest the profile of my state's fight to hold drug companies accountable while still struggling to get help to families impacted by addiction ["An easy target," front page, Oct. 21]. There is no greater tragedy in the opioid epidemic than the trauma inflicted on children. And I know from firsthand experience that no program is more effective at providing treatment to families and children than drug court.

I started experimenting with opioids when I was 12. By 21, I was facing 20 years in prison for burglaries committed to support my addiction. I'd still be locked up if I weren't offered the opportunity for treatment and recovery in the Boone/Lincoln County drug court. It saved my life. I now have a master's

degree in social work and serve as program coordinator for a new family-focused substance use disorder program at Boone Memorial Hospital called Brighter Futures Substance & Mental Health Treatment. I am mom to a beautiful 7-month-old healthy baby boy.

Boone County has launched its first family treatment court, which provides treatment for parents struggling with addiction and trauma. (I serve on the board overseeing the program.) Our family treatment court will help heal my community by providing services to keep families together instead of placing children in foster care. I am filled with hope for my community and work to give back to those who are struggling.

Addiction tears families apart, but recovery can restore the opportunity for a bright future.

Chelsea Carter, Madison, WV



The Interview

The decision of who speaks with the media about your treatment court program is critical. The person should be credible, authentic, comfortable, and willing to share. Most importantly, they should be prepared. In advance of an event or interview, pull out your messaging and review it. Practice answering likely questions. Being interviewed is a skill, and being comfortable does not come naturally. Practice is key.

If you are asking treatment court alumni to participate, it's best to avoid new graduates if possible. Recovery is fragile, and it is always best to prioritize those individuals who are most stable in their recovery.

That said, setting up interviews with recent graduates may be unavoidable if the media are covering a graduation. It is the responsibility of the program to ensure that graduates are fully aware of the presence of media, have the choice to opt out of having their picture taken, and are prepared in advance to speak about their experience.

All Rise advises never asking an individual in early recovery to interview with the media. They may be willing, but they may not be in a position to thoroughly evaluate the long-term impact of telling their story publicly.

It is also critical that any graduate be fully informed of the long-term impact of sharing their story in the media. They may need time to fully consider this decision, and they should always be aware that they can opt not to participate.

Talk with anyone being interviewed to gauge their comfort level and to help them know how to share their story in a way that is truthful and honors their past and where they are today without jeopardizing their recovery, job, or family relationships.

Before any graduate makes the decision to speak to the public, it is critical that they review this document and understand all the considerations that come along with sharing their story publicly.



Sharing Your Treatment Court Story

Messaging Box

A simple messaging box is a handy way to organize your thoughts and capture your most important message. Below is an example of the messaging box for an interview on medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD).

PRIMARY MESSAGE

Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) is a critical component of a larger continuum of care available to treatment court participants.

SUPPORTING SUPPORTING SUPPORTING SUPPORTING MESSAGE MESSAGE MESSAGE MESSAGE Treatment If a treatment plan We have seen Notes on your providers are active includes MOUD, our numerous lives saved message: members of the treatment providers by the combination treatment court work with a local of MOUD, counseling, team, responsible physician to provide recovery support, for developing the appropriate and social services and implementing medication. Many provided by the individualized treatment court of our participants evidence-based have an opioid use team. treatment plans, disorder and are including MOUD currently receiving when clinically MOUD under the appropriate. supervision of our treatment providers.

Staying on Message

Once you've identified your key messages, it is important to stay on message. Reporters tend to ask the same questions in different ways to try and draw out a different response, but you are under no obligation to change your answers! Sticking to the message will emphasize its importance and make it less likely that your answer will be misinterpreted.

There are times when a reporter will veer off an agreed-upon subject to ask about other topics. Or they may probe into areas about which you are not comfortable responding. When this happens, simply pivot back to your key message. Think back to the last time you watched a political debate. Did you notice that the candidate seemed to answer the question they wanted to answer, regardless of what was asked? This is pivoting. Pivoting does not mean being evasive or not forthcoming, it simply means directing the conversation back to the topics you are most comfortable with, prepared for, and able to speak authoritatively on.

For example, during an interview about MOUD a reporter may say, "There is concern that treatment courts have been slow to embrace MOUD. Is this true?"

You are under no obligation to speculate about a general concern or offer a national perspective on all treatment courts. Your focus is on your court, and using a pivot can bring the conversation back to the great work of your program. You may say, "Our focus is on ensuring that our treatment court has the latest best practices related to MOUD. Here are some of the things we are doing..."

Below are examples of pivots you can use to remain on message:

Pivots

It's important to understand...

I want to point out that...

A bigger issue is...

Our focus is...

Let's not forget that...

If we take a closer look, we see...

The evidence on this is clear...

Let me tell you about what we are doing...

Media Rules to Live By

You are in control. The media operate in a fast-paced environment, and working with them can often feel out of your control. It doesn't have to. You are under no obligation to talk with media when they call or approach you for an interview. It is perfectly acceptable to take their information and let them know you will be back in touch. When setting up an interview, specify the duration. Reporters love to extend interviews, because the longer it goes, the more likely it is that you will drop your guard and say something you regret. Offer 10 minutes, and when the time is up, politely inform them that you have to move on to other work.

Know the reporter and the angle. Media

invited to cover an event are generally supportive. When fielding an interview request via email or phone, take time to review any coverage the reporter or outlet has done on your program or treatment courts in general. Are they new to treatment courts, or have they covered them in the past? Have they been supportive or critical? Do they write about related topics, such as the justice system or the impact of substance use and mental health disorders? A little research will help you determine the messaging needed to respond to the inquiry.

Keep it simple. When speaking to a reporter, try to use layman's terms and lose the jargon. Do not dumb down what you have to say, but try to speak plainly, like you're talking to a family member or friend who's unfamiliar with your work. Never assume a reporter has any prior knowledge of treatment court programs. If you need to avoid a particular subject, simply say you aren't able to discuss that, and pivot to a topic you can talk about in more depth. Try to avoid saying "no comment."

Prepare. Take time to do your research and prepare your messaging/talking points. If you plan to discuss statistics, be sure to verify them first. If you are unsure of a statistic, it's better not to offer it.

All Rise is a resource for national statistics. You can also reach out to contacts at the state level for data specific to your state or community.

Tell a story. Facts and data are important, but the most likely quote to be featured in news coverage is one that has emotional resonance. Think of an individual story that captures the transformation that occurs in treatment court and helps audiences visualize what you're saying.

After the Story

After the story runs, there are several ways you can amplify your message. Here are a few ideas:

- Link to the story from your court's website.
- Email a link to the story to staff, community partners, donors, alumni, etc.
- Post the story to court and personal social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn.
- Email positive coverage to your elected officials, including your members of Congress and their staff. They will love it!
- Write a thank-you note or email to the reporter.
- Send a link to the story to communications@allrise.org.

Getting Help

If you need help with your efforts to reach out to the media and share your treatment court story, All Rise and its staff of experts stand ready to assist. Please email communications@allrise.org. We can provide coaching and information and connect you with a number of resources, including:



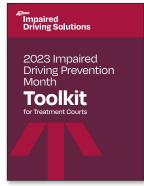
Sharing Your Treatment Court Story



Managing the Message During a Crisis



Veterans Day Toolkit for Treatment Courts



Impaired Driving Prevention Month Toolkit



National Treatment Court Month Toolkit



Treatment Court Institute 小 Impaired Driving Solutions

Justice for Vets 小

Center for Advancing Justice

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Treatment courts perform their duties without manifestation, by word or conduct, of bias or prejudice, including, but not limited to, bias or prejudice based on race, gender, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, language, or socioeconomic status.

All Rise

625 N. Washington Street Suite 212 Alexandria, VA 22314 703.575.9400 phone 703.575.9402 fax instagram.com/allrise_org/

f facebook.com/allrise.org/

in linkedin.com/company/weallrise/

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allrise.org