

**U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
“FY 2014 Members and Outside Witness Hearing”**

**Testimony of Matthew Perry
March 21, 2013**

Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear before you today to discuss an issue that I have come to believe is the most important criminal justice reform of our lifetime: Drug Courts. Last year, the House of Representatives had the vision to increase funding for Drug Courts to \$45 million at the Department of Justice, as well as include \$4 million for Veterans Treatment Courts so that the men and women who have served this nation receive the treatment they have earned. Today I am asking our incredible champions in the House to maintain \$45 million for Drug Courts and \$4 million for Veterans Treatment Courts in the Fiscal Year 2014 budget. This investment will generate immediate returns by any standard you choose to measure, from unmatched cost-savings stemming from reduced re-arrests, law enforcement contacts and court hearings to lives restored, families reunited, and communities rescued from the epidemic of drug abuse and crime.

I know firsthand the personal and societal devastation caused by substance abuse. When I found recovery from prescription drug abuse I dedicated myself to helping others. This is precisely why I make it a priority to come to Washington, DC and meet with you about Drug Courts. Two years ago, I led a rally at the Capitol with hundreds of Drug Court professionals from across the country. We met with Members of Congress and told of the incredible success of programs in their state. That same year, I was honored to speak at a briefing with the House Committee on Addiction, Treatment and Recovery. Every time I visit the nation's capitol I am reminded of the outstanding leadership of this great body. So, I am here today to speak with you once again about Drug Courts. Drug Courts are the single most effective program for getting serious drug addicts into life-long recovery, putting them back to work, back in school, and back with their families.

I have seen individuals mired in the deepest depths of addiction transformed by Drug Courts. I have spoken with veterans who after years of being unable to sleep without pain killers and alcohol are now healthy, law abiding pillars of their community. I have met children whose families have been saved because Drug Court, and only Drug Court, was able to keep their mother from using Methamphetamine.

From saving money to saving lives, from eliminating racial disparities to protecting public safety, from cutting crime to restoring families, from coming to the aid of our veterans to stopping impaired drivers, Drug Courts are a budget solution that we cannot afford to cut. There are hundreds of other reasons, but for the sake of time I will give you just four.

First, Drug Courts reduce recidivism at a level unmatched by any other program. By closely supervising participants and keeping them in treatment long enough to find permanent recovery, Drug Courts are a stabilizing force on our criminal justice system and society at-large. Approximately 75% of the people who complete Drug Court will never be arrested again. When Drug Court is unavailable due to budget cuts? Roughly 80% of addicted offenders will reoffend and wind up right back before the judge.

Second, Drug Courts save this country money. More research has been published on the effects of the courts than on virtually all other criminal justice programs combined. The facts are now known: Drug Courts have been found to save up to \$13,000 for every individual they serve. Research has also confirmed that the return on investment far exceeds that of any other program. Drug Courts save \$2.21 for every \$1 invested. When indirect cost-offsets were taken into account — such as savings from reduced foster care placements and healthcare service utilization — studies have reported economic benefits as high as \$27 for every \$1 invested.

Third, Drug Courts have stepped up to serve the growing number of veterans who face charges stemming from substance abuse to mental health issues. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken an unprecedented toll on our men and women in uniform. While most return home strengthened by their service, far too many

struggle in their effort to readjust to life outside the military. Often, mental health issues are compounded by substance abuse, family strife, unemployment, and homelessness; ultimately leading to incarceration. Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts ensure that the criminal justice system effectively identifies, assesses, and responds to all justice-involved veterans appropriately, keeping them out of jail and connected to benefits and treatment. With 30,000 soldiers expected to come home this year, we cannot afford to cut the last line of defense between their healthy future and a life of mental anguish and self-medication.

Finally, Drug Courts are being successfully implemented across the country. In states like Texas and New York, Drug Courts are reducing the prison population so much that expensive prisons are closing their doors. In small towns, like Somerset, Kentucky, Drug Court is helping to take back a community from the scourge of prescription drug abuse. Today, over 2,700 Drug Courts in the United States annually serve 135,000 seriously addicted, prison bound offenders. Every citizen benefits when one of these Drug Courts gets an addicted person clean and sober, pays taxes and becomes a productive citizen.

We live in unique and uncertain economic times and there is no doubt that the decisions you must make are not easy. But given the overwhelming evidence of Drug Courts success and the billions of dollars that have already been saved, I hope that this is one decision that will be easy. I strongly urge the House of Representatives to maintain \$45 million for Drug Courts at the Department of Justice and \$4 million for Veterans Treatment Courts.