

Testimony in support of LD 1266 to the Committee on Judiciary

April 11, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 1266, Resolve, Directing the Attorney General to Convene a Working Group to Propose a Plan for Expanding the Reach of Treatment Courts.

A plan to expand the use of specialized drug courts throughout the state giving access to everyone who needs them will be in the best interest of every Mainer.

The success of the drug court system is described in this Bureau of Justice Assistance article: [30 Years of Drug Courts: Justice Reform That Works](#)

“What began in a single Miami courtroom in 1989 has multiplied to more than 3,500 drug and treatment courts in every state in the union, fundamentally changing the legal system’s approach to people who commit crimes as a result of substance abuse disorder and mental illness.

The practices and procedures of drug courts vary from place to place, but all differ radically from their traditional counterparts in one respect: Their primary goal is not punishing past bad acts with imprisonment but preventing future bad acts through recovery.

The original drug court was, in many ways, an act of desperation. In the 1980s, amid an alarming surge in crime, America had declared a “war on drugs.” Miami, in particular, was besieged by cocaine-fueled violence. And a number of Miami criminal justice professionals feared that they were losing the war.

Arresting more and more people for drug crimes, and imposing increasingly severe prison sentences, overwhelmed the judicial system but did little to break the grim cycle of repeat criminal offenses. A deeply frustrated ad hoc group in Miami decided to try something different, and the first drug court was launched.

From the beginning, Miami officials were encouraged by the results that the drug court achieved. And their faith has been borne out.

For example, a recent study of Pennsylvania’s adult drug treatment courts and driving under the influence courts found that they reduced recidivism by 36 percent to 75 percent, depending on the program. These courts also saved the state money by reducing the number of people rearrested for crimes, which cuts the number of trials in state courtrooms and the amount of time people serve in jail.

In addition, a [comprehensive national study](#) in 2011 by the National Institute of Justice concluded that drug courts work.

The study found that drug court participants are less likely to test positive for drug use and less likely to be rearrested than comparable individuals. And although drug-court programs initially cost more than traditional judicial proceedings, they save money in the long run by lowering repeat arrests and incarceration, reducing overall costs by an average of at least \$5,680 per person.”

The Attorney General and all of the stakeholder groups listed in LD1266 are committed to public safety, public health and sound economic policies. Together they will design a realistic plan to expand specialized drug court access to all our communities. Drug courts reduce recidivism (and so crime), they save money, and they save and help restore lives and families. I look forward to the drug court expansion.

I hope you will support LD 1266.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.

<https://bja.ojp.gov/news/blog/30-years-drug-courts-justice-reform-works>