

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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Thank you, Carson [Fox], for that kind introduction. I'm thrilled to be here to help close out what I'm sure has been an outstanding conference. I want to start by thanking Carson, the executive committee, and every member of the fantastic NADCP team – including, of course, Wilbur, the Chief Morale Officer. Let me also offer my congratulations to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and the entire drug court movement for three decades of promoting safety and sobriety in America's communities. What an amazing run it's been! I'm so proud to have been a loyal part of that movement, and so pleased that I can continue my support at the Department of Justice.

I also want to thank my colleague Jon Adler, who you'll hear from in just a minute, as well as his great team in our Bureau of Justice Assistance, for the outstanding work they do every day to support drug courts, and to change lives – which drug courts absolutely do.

A special thank you to my colleague and friend Jim Carroll, the Director of the President's Office of National Drug Control Policy. Jim works tirelessly leading the Administrations' efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Thank you, Jim, for all you are doing.

We are so fortunate to have Attorney General Barr, who understands the gravity of this crisis. He has committed substantial resources to interdiction and prosecution, and to improving the law enforcement and treatment response. OJP awarded more than \$320 million to combat this epidemic last year. A very substantial piece of these investments went to supporting drug courts.

I'm so happy to be here today and to be among this terrific group of speakers assigned to send you back to your communities energized and ready to make a difference. And there is no question – drug courts make a huge difference. I've seen it first-hand.

As Carson mentioned, before joining the Department of Justice – first as Acting Director of the Office on Violence Against Women and now as head of the Office of Justice Programs – I spent 11 years as a state trial court judge in Eagle County, Colorado, where I started two problem-solving courts, a drug court and a DUI court. Overseeing those two dockets remains among the biggest highlights of my career. With my multi-disciplinary team, we accepted over 150 clients in a rural community. Our recidivism rate for each program was lower than the national average. What was key was following best practices, and the 10 key components.

Our clients were people of all ages and from all walks of life with addiction problems that were significant enough to bring them into contact with the justice system. We worked hard to give them the tools and skills they needed to remain drug-free and sober, and out of the courtroom – and we expected them to work hard, too. We demanded 365 consecutive days of sobriety, and we made them get, and hold, a job. And we were tough. You fail a drug test, you skip a meeting, you lie to me – you go to jail. We were strict, but we were fair – and we did everything we could to provide support. We gave

our clients job training, drug treatment, counseling, and a host of other services. We also incentivized our drug court clients with a wheel of fortune. If you had a perfect two weeks, you got to spin the wheel in Court. We had small “prizes” – a sobriety literature basket, affirmation cards, a free UA, five hours off community service – which were written on the wheel. Clients loved it and would discuss before court whether they would be getting a spin or not! Our goal was for them to return to their homes and communities ready to be productive citizens. And in the vast majority of cases, it worked.

Our success had a lot to do with the very dedicated people I had the good fortune to work with – the law enforcement and probation officers, the human services professionals, the counselors, the community and faith-based groups – but it also had much to do with the very model our courts were based on. It’s a model now in use in more than 3,000 drug courts nationwide, and it works. There’s a reason there’s a more than 30 percent difference in the rate of recidivism between drug court participants and those whose cases are handled by the more traditional route. Turns out that accountability and social support are not mutually exclusive concepts, and incarceration doesn’t need to be the default for every drug- or alcohol-involved defendant. Drug courts are an enormous public safety asset, and if we’re serious about breaking the cycle of addiction and crime, we should be doing all we can to make sure every community has a drug court docket.

I’m excited that we have an Attorney General in Bill Barr who cares so deeply about the safety of America’s communities. President Trump’s First Step Act and Second Chance Reauthorization Act have shown an incredible commitment to criminal justice reform, of which drug courts play a vital role. Our awesome Attorney General has given me the privilege of leading the Office of Justice Programs, and I plan to use this incredible opportunity to promote drug courts as an avenue to greater public safety.

I’m pleased that we’ve been able to ratchet up our support for both juvenile and adult drug courts. Our expanded investments come at an especially critical time in our nation’s fight against drugs and crime. You know the statistics: In 2017, more than 70,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That’s 192 people each day – more than the number of lives lost in car accidents or gun-related homicides. An overwhelming majority of these overdose deaths involved an opioid, including prescription opioids, heroin, and synthetic drugs like fentanyl.

Drug courts are a solid investment in public safety, but they’re also a vehicle for personal transformation. I’ve seen it, time and again – men and women who’ve hit rock bottom, gripped by addiction and driven to the point of breaking the law, who were able to turn their lives around because a system that might simply have punished them, chose instead to believe in them and give them a second chance. It’s a story many of you have been privileged to be part of, and it’s a story we should all hope to re-enact.

I’m proud of the part I’ve played in the 30-year history of drug courts, and I’m grateful for the camaraderie and support of so many drug court professionals across the country. You are making a difference – in the lives of your clients and in the health and

safety of the communities you serve. I encourage you to keep up the good work and to let me know what we at OJP can do to better support you.

It has been a privilege to be here with you today, and it is an honor to stand with you in the fight against addiction and crime.

Thank you for all you do, and best wishes on your return home.

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