

Texas Drug Courts

What is a Drug Court?

- A Drug Court is a type of intensive supervision consisting of judicially-led treatment programs for offenders whose offense history or assessment indicates that they may benefit from this option.
- Research shows that drug courts provide extensive supervision, more comprehensive than other forms of community supervision.
- Factors contributing to the success of drug courts:
 - Intensive, face-to-face interaction with a judicial authority;
 - Immediate treatment, a continuum of swift reaction and sanctions to relapse;
 - An environment focused intensively on marshalling community resources toward success.

History of Drug Courts in Texas

- In 2001, H.B. 1287 mandated that all Texas counties with populations exceeding 550,000 apply for federal and other funds to establish drug courts. Drug courts were also established in several CSCDs that were not mandated.
- The mandated counties are: Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Hidalgo, Tarrant, and Travis.
- Dallas, El Paso, Tarrant and Travis counties have operational Drug Courts. Harris has applied for federal funds; Bexar and Hidalgo are in the process of application.
- Three counties not mandated have Drug Courts: Ft. Bend, Jefferson, Montgomery.
- Texas counties have implemented adult drug courts primarily as a pretrial diversion; Jefferson also applies it in lieu of revocation for those on community supervision. Dallas has an additional drug court specifically for SAFP re-entry.

How Do Drug Courts Work?

- A defendant is assessed and determined to be responsive to treatment with a non-violent offense.
- The program includes monitoring by the drug court judge, weekly supervision by a community supervision officer, frequent urinalysis, and treatment sessions several times weekly.
- Programs last from one year to eighteen months.
- If a pretrial program, the case is dropped upon successful completion. If a probation program, the offender participates as a condition of probation.

How are Drug Courts Funded?

- Each court costs approximately \$163,000; the state appropriated only \$83,000 per court funded. Not all counties mandated received funds.
- Federal grant funds pay for a portion of the remaining costs for some counties: Dallas, Tarrant, El Paso, Ft. Bend, and Travis.
- Local CSCDs contribute funds. In 2002, approximately \$1,651,618 in local probation funding was re-directed for Drug Courts.
- Local counties may contribute funds. In Ft. Bend County, the CSCD and county have jointly set aside over \$100,000 per year for three years for the Drug Court.
- Payments by program participants contribute to the overall budgets.

Are Drug Courts Effective?

- A 2002 study by the Criminal Justice Policy Council indicated that those who successfully complete a drug court program have considerably lower recidivism rate over three years: 3.4 % as compared to 21.4% for those who did not complete and 26.6% for the comparison group who did not participate.
- National drug court research data indicates similar results.
- Texas Drug Court administrators also conducted a study with similar results.

Expansion to Community Supervision Officers (CSO) in Satellite Administrative Courts

- Currently, the size of the participant population is limited due to the judge's weekly interaction with a relatively small number. In 2000, 855 offenders were served out of 17,234 arrested for drug possession.
- Expansion would include administrative courts within CSCDs.
- A supervising CSO and CSO staff would have similar authority and positive factors as a drug court judge.
- Drug court participants would also periodically report to the Drug Court Judge.