

# Drug Courts Report

## THE PROBLEM:

- Too many of our young men and women who are trapped by addictions are ending up in prison. In 2009 157,222 individuals were in our state prisons and 32% of them were African American.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that nationally 80% of those in our criminal justice system have drug or alcohol addictions.
- Our state is going broke spending millions of dollars on our prison system. In 2009 Florida spent two and half billion dollars on our prison system.<sup>3</sup> It costs \$18,980 per year to incarcerate just one person.

## DRUG COURTS AS PART OF THE SOLUTION:

- Drug-courts are programs where those who have drug or alcohol addictions and commit non-violent offenses can be sent to local drug-treatment and be monitored by a judge, rather than go to prison.
- Those who go to drug court are 80% less likely to commit a crime again than those who go to prison.<sup>4</sup>
- It only costs \$4,750 to send someone to drug court compared to almost \$19,000/year to keep someone in prison.
- This does not begin to count the costs we save when we help people get off of drugs, become productive members of society again, and are able to be good parents to their children.<sup>5</sup>

## THE FLORIDA DRUG COURT EXPANSION PROGRAM

- Our state currently has \$19 million from the federal government to expand drug courts in 8 counties in Florida as a pilot project to see if investing in drug courts can save the prison system money. (Those in pilot project: Broward, Escambia, Hillsborough, Marion, Orange, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia.)
- It is estimated that with this \$19 million, 4,000 people could be diverted from prison, saving the state \$95 million.<sup>6</sup>
- However targeted offenders are not able to make use of this program because the criteria are too restrictive. In other words, there is too much red-tape keeping this program from being effective.
- By November 2010, 2,000 inmates were supposed to have been served with over half the money spent. But in reality only 650 people had been admitted to the program, and only 14% of the money had been spent.
- If Florida doesn't spend the \$19 Million on this program, we will lose the money.

## SOLUTION:

- We are worked with our sister organizations throughout the state of Florida to get the state legislature to pass a bill that will loosen the criteria and allow more people who commit non-violent offenses to make use of this program.
- We believe that successfully implementing this drug court expansion pilot project is a key step to transforming our state prison system. We want to see a prison system that rehabilitates people and turns them into productive members of society, rather than one that traps them in a revolving door of addictions, crime and incarceration.

## RESULTS:

State **Representative Darryl Rouson** was the first to respond to this issue, filing House Bill 81. Senator Wise of Jacksonville quickly submitted a companion bill in the Senate. **Rep. Kriseman, Rep. Brandes, Senator Latvala, Senator Joyner, and Senator Fasano** from Pinellas County all signed on as co-sponsors.

Together with our sister organizations in Jacksonville, Daytona Beach, Lakeland, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, and Miami, we secured **fourteen co-sponsors** for this bill from across the state and across party lines.

After passing through its first committee hearing in the house with a 13 to 1 vote, HB 81 remained stalled in the house for a month as Representative Harrell from Port St. Lucie refused to put the bill on the agenda of the Health and Human Services Access Sub-committee. After we and our sister organizations sent **4,000 petitions** to the capital and encouraged our local representatives to speak directly with Rep. Harrell, she allowed the bill to come to a vote where it passed the committee 14 to 0.

**On April 6<sup>th</sup> our bill passed the Senate with 39 yes votes and 0 no votes!**  
**On April 26<sup>th</sup> our bill passed in the House with 117 yes votes and 1 no vote!**  
**On May 5<sup>th</sup> the bill was signed by the governor and became law!**

We will now be working with our local officials to ensure that they take advantage of this opportunity to send more non-violent offenders from our community to drug courts.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Corrections website, Fiscal year 2008-2009.

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Appropriations System/Planning and Budgeting Subsystem

<sup>4</sup> OPPAGA March 2009 Report

<sup>5</sup> 50% of those in the Pinellas drug court are women, most of them have children.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability Report No. 10-54, October 2010