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Drug Courts

The mission of the drug court program is to assist defendants in overcoming alcohol and other drug dependencies while resolving related criminal charges. Drug courts involve a highly specialized team process within the existing Superior Court structure that addresses nonviolent drug-related cases. They are unique in the criminal justice environment because they build a close collaborative relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment professionals.

The drug court judge heads a team of court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators and treatment professionals who work together to support and monitor a participant's recovery. The program maintains a critical balance of authority, supervision, support and encouragement.

Drug court programs are rigorous, requiring intensive supervision based on frequent drug testing and court appearances, along with tightly structured regimens of treatment and recovery services. This level of supervision permits the program to support the recovery process, but also allows supervisors to react swiftly to impose appropriate therapeutic sanctions or to reinstate criminal proceedings when participants cannot comply with the program.

Drug court programs are characterized by:

- Collaborative links among the courts, prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement, treatment providers, social service agencies and community-based non-profit organizations;
- A standardized assessment process used to identify eligible non-violent offenders;
- Staff members trained in substance abuse and recovery issues operating in a non-adversarial atmosphere.
- A system of graduated sanctions and incentives to encourage recovery goals and hold offenders accountable for non-compliant behaviors.
- Continuous training and education on a state and national level for drug court professionals;
- On-going program evaluation and implementation of improvements as warranted.

The New Jersey Adult Drug Court History

The New Jersey drug court model was developed through the hard work and dedication of judges, prosecutors, public defenders, drug court professionals, substance abuse evaluators and probation officers.

Drug court began in New Jersey in 1996 when the Camden and Essex Superior Courts started accepting participants. These local projects evolved into well-defined drug court programs that paved the way for additional pilot program efforts. By 1999 additional programs were established in Mercer, Passaic and Union Counties. In 1999, the Chief Justice asked the Conference of Criminal Presiding Judges to review the existing adult drug courts to determine whether drug courts were a “best practice” in the Criminal Division and the potential for expansion. In May 2000, the Conference of Criminal Presiding Judges recommended drug courts as a “best practice” and in June of the same year the Judicial Council adopted drug courts as a “best practice” and called for a comprehensive statewide proposal. Issues of equal access and fundamental fairness required that the Judiciary produce a plan for expansion of drug courts to all counties in the state.

In December 2000, the Judiciary released a document entitled “Drug Courts: A Plan for Statewide Implementation” proposing statewide implementation of adult drug courts based on the success of the pilot initiatives. On September 6, 2001, L.2001, c.243 was signed by the Governor. That law provided the Judiciary with funding to expand drug courts beyond the initial five courts. The plan involved a three-phase process resulting in the establishment of a statewide drug court program that would focus on substance-abusing criminal offenders who are charged with non-violent offenses and who do not have prior convictions for violent crimes.

Statewide Implementation Project

Phase I: Involved the transfer of the pilot drug courts from grant funding to direct appropriations from the State of New Jersey.

Phase II: Began on April 2, 2002, when five new drug court programs, in Bergen, Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem, Monmouth, Morris/Sussex and Ocean Vicinages became operational.

Phase III: The remaining five vicinages in Atlantic/Cape May, Burlington, Hudson, Middlesex and Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren became operational on September 1, 2004.

Mandatory Drug Court

L.2012, c.23, was signed into law by Governor Christie on July 19, 2012 to expand the existing voluntary Drug Court to compel additional drug offenders into the program.

As outlined in Section III: Drug Court Expansion Projects, the "Special Probation" statute N.J.S.A. 2C: 35-14 was amended, effective July 1, 2013, to add two sections, N.J.S.A. 2C:35-14-1 and N.J.S.A. 2C:35-14-2, to require admission to the Drug Court program of otherwise eligible offenders regardless of whether they made a voluntary application. The mandatory Drug Court project was incorporated into the statewide adult drug court program in five phases as follows:

- July 1, 2013: Vicinage 6 – Hudson, Vicinage 13 – Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren, and Vicinage 14 – Ocean.
- July 1, 2014: Vicinage 1 – Atlantic/Cape May, Vicinage 7 – Mercer, and Vicinage 11 – Passaic.
- July 1, 2015: Vicinage 2 – Bergen, Vicinage 3 – Burlington, and Vicinage 9 – Monmouth.

July 1, 2016: Vicinage 5 – Essex, Vicinage 15 – Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem, and Vicinage 8 – Middlesex.

- July 1, 2017: Vicinage 4 – Camden, Vicinage 10 – Morris/Sussex, and Vicinage 12 – Union.

For more information, contact the Administrative Office of the Courts, Criminal Practice Division, Statewide Coordination, P.O. Box 982, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, or the drug court coordinators in the vicinages.

Drug Court Information

[Adult Drug Court Transfer Policy](#)

[Drug Court Judges and Drug Court Coordinators](#)

[Drug Court FAQs](#)

[Manual on Adult Drug Courts in New Jersey](#)

[New Jersey TASC Programs](#)

[NJ Statistics](#)

[Drug Court Success Stories](#)

Other Government Resources

[Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project at American University](#)

[Mental Health Resources](#)

[National Association of Drug Court Professionals](#)

[National Drug Court Institute](#)

[National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

[NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#)

[Office of National Drug Control Policy](#)

Mission Statement

We are an independent branch of government constitutionally entrusted with the fair and just resolution of disputes in order to preserve the rule of law and to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States and this State.

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