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Written Testimony

## **Drug Court Works!**

I would like to thank Congressman John Boozman and Congressman Mark Souder for this opportunity to share with you my battle with drug addiction and my road to recovery. Thanksgiving weekend 1998 was the first time that I used methamphetamine intravenously. Like many tragic stories of addiction my life quickly spun out of control. The first casualty of my addiction was a well paying job. I justified to myself, the use of this powerful stimulant as necessary to enable me to meet the rigorous demands of my job. I soon found myself unable to do anything without methamphetamine.

The next casualty of my addiction was my marriage. I then lost my house and soon began trading or selling my personal possessions to feed my \$100 a day habit. I became unemployable because every moment of my life was consumed with the getting and using of methamphetamine. This became my full-time job. I spent no time with my 3 beautiful children or the rest of my family. Looking back at this time in my life I wonder how they could still love me when I didn't even love myself. After destroying the lifetime of trust between my family and myself, the final casualty was the loss of my freedom. I was arrested and spent 54 days in 2 different county jails. After the fog of addiction left me I swore I would never go back again. Upon release from jail my family graciously took me in. My parents are wonderfully loving and just wanted to save their oldest son. I managed to stay somewhat clean for a few months until my parents went on vacation and entrusted me with their home. Two weeks later I had stolen \$1,000 out of their checking account as well as several hundred dollars in credit card fraud against their accounts. I had destroyed their trust once again.

I spent the next year using sporadically and trying to maintain some semblance of a normal life, by holding down a job. The normalcy soon became insanity after being terminated for threatening a co-worker's life while high on methamphetamine. I then resigned myself to become a full time criminal to support my habit. I got involved with a group of career junkies who had all bounce in and out of prison their entire lives. I began to believe the only way to get back a semi-normal life was to learn to manufacture methamphetamine. I soon found myself manufacturing and trafficking full time. There are limits imposed locally on the purchase of key ingredients of meth. It was not uncommon to drive as far away as Chicago, Illinois to purchase these ingredients in any quantity desired. The people I associated with all bounced in and out of jail and it was only a matter of time before I was locked up.

On March 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 I was arrested in an apartment while police were serving an arrest warrant on someone in the apartment. I then spent the next 58 days in the Sebastian County jail. Once my head cleared, I swore to myself again that I would never go back to drugs. I believed that my current charges would only warrant another suspended sentence but I was wrong. My public defender informed me that I was looking at 2 years in the Arkansas Department of Corrections. This would mean that I would spend 4 months and 22 days as state property. Seeing as my felonies would only require me to serve 20% of the 2-

year sentence before becoming eligible for parole and that I had already spent nearly 2 months in jail, I was working with my public defender on trying to get a time served deal.

During a conversation with my father, while incarcerated, he suggested that I look into a new program called Drug Court. I told him that I had already filled out an application, but was afraid that I would not be accepted because of the limited space available. Every inmate that I knew had applied for drug court but only 20 spaces were available. I have much gratitude for Ben Beland and Amy Click in the Sebastian County Public defenders office, who were able to help me enter SDCD.

Upon release from county jail I was required to report every morning at 8 a.m. to the state parole and probation office. I began my drug court program by attending 3 group counseling sessions, 3 narcotics anonymous meetings, and 3 random drug screens per week. In addition to this normal drug court schedule I also had one on one counseling sessions. I was also required to obtain and maintain employment. In addition to all these requirements I was subjected to random at home visits by representatives of drug court whom were allowed to search my living space at their discretion. I was forbidden to communicate with any criminals or people I used to associate with. Violations of any of the above requirements subjected me to drug court sanctions or dismissal from the program. I believed that because of the difficulty in qualifying for drug court and the number of people desiring this opportunity that I had no room to fail. In my 15 months in drug court I was only sanctioned/punished once for talking back in a sarcastic manner to a counselor during a group therapy session.

This strict supervision did not allow me the opportunity to fail or slip up. I had tried two previous times to quit using on my own with no success. I was unable to recognize the situations and people that threatened my recovery. In previous attempts to get clean on my own I had been introduced to Narcotics Anonymous and was unable to use the program for more than a few months without falling back into my old patterns. By requiring me to attend three NA meetings a week, Drug Court forced me to be disciplined enough to develop the foundation of NA principles that I live by to this very day. I am grateful to NA for showing me how to live without drugs or alcohol. I am also grateful to Drug Court for requiring me to attend these meetings until the program became a cornerstone of my life. Because of the anonymous nature of NA I will refrain from discussing this fellowship any further, but I encourage anyone who has a problem to seek out this life changing organization.

During my drug court journey I saw many people fail to live up to the requirements. Many were punished with county jail time and community service while others were removed from the program and sent off to prison. The Sebastian County Drug Court's graduation rate is similar to the national average where very few make it through this strict regiment. However, for the few that go on to graduation it means a new chance at life that did not exist a few years ago. The recidivism rate amongst graduates is far lower than amongst similar offenders who were sent to prison. In Drug Court we are given tools and education that allow us to end the cycle of addiction. It's like being a cancer survivor who is in remission. My addiction is still a part of me and I require treatment through my NA program, but I am able to live a healthy and productive life.

I have been clean of both drugs and alcohol since March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002. I went back to school and recently graduated from the University of Arkansas Fort Smith with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. I am currently looking into attending graduate school. I have maintained steady employment since my release from county jail and am proud to say that I am paying my taxes. I maintained a 3.8 GPA and was active in many school organizations. On graduation day I was honored to receive the College of Business Student Service Award for my dedicated service to the college. This award is especially important to me because service to my community is one of the core principles I try to live my new life by. It is one of the primary reasons why I am here today. I would like for the public and the lawmakers to know that the old adage "once an addict, always an addict" does not have to be true. Alternative sentencing programs like Drug Court do work. The "lock them up and throw away the key" mentality is not the answer. Had I gone to prison or just gotten a suspended sentence I don't believe that I would be here before you today.

To put a drug criminal through drug court costs a few thousand dollars a year, while housing them in a penitentiary with violent hardened criminals, costs tens of thousands of dollars a year. From a purely economic standpoint it makes sense to try to save these addicted souls. I do however support sending drug criminals like myself to prison as a last resort. I believe that the threat of going to prison helped me to recover. For years our nations policy of fighting the war on drugs has involved increasing the sentences of drug criminals and we have continued to build more and more prisons at great expense without much success at winning this war. Drug Court and other alternative sentencing programs attempt to win the hearts and minds of the addict. We spend billions of dollars a year as a nation burning fields in South America trying to stop the supply of narcotics but spend very few dollars on the demand side of this business. If my story can help an addict find recovery I believe that I am helping as much or more than any covert operation can do to win the war on drugs. I know that I personally have decreased the demand for methamphetamine in Western Arkansas by over a hundred dollars a day.

While in county jail I spent time with a man who became a close friend. While talking we both agreed that we were going to kick our addictions. He went to prison and I went into drug court. In the time since those jail house discussions about changing our life, he has been released from prison only to return again and be released again. For many drug criminals this is the pattern. In and out of prison for short periods of time, because of the overcrowding that is an ongoing problem. The only solution that makes sense is alternative sentencing programs like Drug Court.

A study commissioned by the state of Oregon found that for every dollar spent on these programs the saving to society is ten times that amount. Another study in the state of California concluded that the \$14 million investment in Drug Courts, created a total cost avoidance of over \$43 million for the state. I recently read a article from the Institute for Applied Research, "What you learn is that drug courts, which involve treatment for all the individuals and real support – along with sanctions when they fail – are a more effective method of dealing with the drug problem than either probation or prison." Thank you and God bless America.

