

To the Joint Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Public Safety

Co-Chairs Sen. Jackie Winters and Rep. Carla Piluso, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alton Harvey, Jr. I was born and raised in inner city, southside Chicago. I am 57 years old and have lived in Oregon, mostly in Washington County, for about 25 years. I am the lead mentor for the Volunteers of America (VOA) InAct outpatient drug treatment program and I work directly with the Multnomah County S.T.A.R.T. court. That stands for Success through Accountability, Restitution and Treatment. I am also a graduate of the S.T.A.R.T. court. On October 19, 2019, I will be seven years clean.

Addiction, Crime, and Homelessness – My drug of choice was crack cocaine. I burned my bridges with my family and eventually ended up homeless on the streets of Portland. I have a record of more than 50 felony and misdemeanor arrests and I had a lot of stints in jail (including 92 bookings into the Washington County jail).

By the time I succeeded in turning my life around through treatment court, I had been through residential treatment eight times. I would stay clean for a while and then relapse. At one point I was in the courtroom of Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Eric Bloch on a drug charge. He knew I went a year clean in my last treatment program and he said to me, “Alton, you know how to get clean, it’s just staying clean that’s an issue for you.” That really resonated with me. Judge Bloch said he wanted to put me in S.T.A.R.T. court and get me back into inpatient treatment.

I didn’t know what S.T.A.R.T. was – but I started to see that things were different. **The D.A., the judge, the treatment staff, along with the public defender – standing along with them I had a team, not to punish me but to support me through this process.** In all my prior experiences, judges and other people in the criminal justice system were always against me. It was amazing to have them working with me, and for me. This time I was ready – all-hands-on-deck – it was for me – not for my parents, not for my significant other, not for my son. And because of that, treatment was easier. I was a model client. I became a Client Council member. I was an advocate for clients. I finished on time in exactly 12 months.

Reasons to Support Treatment Court – I’m not judging who deserves to go to prison and who doesn’t. But there are so many people that have felt that feeling I felt, about needing to make a change. If I didn’t have drug court and Judge Bloch I wouldn’t be where I am. If those other people had an opportunity to do something else, it could make a difference for them too. Don’t give up on anyone! **Since I have been working with S.T.A.R.T. court, I have seen success story after success story – people you never in a million years would have said they would have made it.** It’s a direct result of the concept of team, support and accountability presented by drug court. We’re not talking about millions of people, but it’s a lot of people. **If a program proves it works, why not fund more courts, more judges, more staff, more DA’s, more public defenders to make it better?**

Thank you.

Alton Harvey, Jr.

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