

AGENDA FOR JUSTICE BACKGROUND

CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION ALBERTA BRANCH

DRUG TREATMENT COURT

Background: Drug treatment courts (DTCs) are holistic pre-sentence treatment programs that divert certain offenders away from imprisonment on the condition that they complete an intensive judicially-supervised addiction recovery program. The programs serve non-violent offenders charged with offences that are directly or indirectly related to drug addiction. DTCs have been in operation in Edmonton and Calgary since 2005 and 2007, respectively, and in other parts of North America for 25 years. Studies have shown that these programs provide a significant return on investment to society in the form of reduced policing, courts and corrections costs, and less victimization and property loss. Program graduates become contributing, tax-paying members of society.

Demand for these successful programs has always exceeded their capacity, and both DTCs would expand if they were given increased stable, predictable funding. The funding for these programs has historically come from government, but funding has been substantially reduced over the last several years. As a consequence, both DTCs have cut back on the number of clients they have been able to serve. Private funding has made up a portion of the difference, but has been inadequate to allow these programs to serve the number of clients that they have in the past.

The Issue: CBA Alberta members are expressing concern over the shortage and stability of funding for both DTCs in Alberta. The programs save people from lives of despair in addiction, and inadequately funding the programs will save only a small amount of money with an almost immediate net loss in other areas. There is evidence that people otherwise served by the program would return to crime, use other social services, and occupy police, court, and corrections resources.

Why the CBA is Involved: The purpose of the CBA is to promote and improve the administration of and access to justice and equality, supporting the corollary benefit of crime reduction. It benefits members of the CBA and society to offer the public a fair, effective, and efficient justice system.

Desired Outcome: Support and advocate for social issues impacting the justice system. In this case, support proactively, those struggling with addictions, and to keep those individuals out of the criminal justice system. CBA Alberta believes that programs like DTCs are a critical component of the integrated approach.

CBA Alberta supports and advocates for government funding of a sustainable, worthwhile, long-term program that reduces drug use and criminal involvement among repeat offenders who are suffering from the chronic disease of addiction. It is critically important that the Governments of Alberta and Canada strive to divert people with addictions and mental illness away from the criminal justice system.

The CBA supports the Governments of Alberta and Canada extending the funding commitment for the DTCs and, as part of that effort, establishing the DTCs in the province as permanent fixtures of our criminal justice system. Funding of the DTCs and other drug treatment courts fits with results-based budgeting, and the goal that government programs deliver maximum value for tax dollars to Albertans.

