



Drug Diversion Court's Twenty Years of Success Recognized at Graduation Ceremony

Governor Markell, Senator Carper pay tribute to program and newest graduates

Wilmington, DE – Having built a record of turning around the lives of Delawareans with substance abuse issues, the New Castle County Superior Court's Drug Diversion Court graduated its newest class today at the New Castle County Courthouse where Governor Jack Markell and Senator Tom Carper lauded the Court's achievements over twenty years. 

The program, which diverts people arrested for certain drug offenses to treatment instead of a trial, has met its goals of recovery and lower rates of recidivism for people with drug addictions.

"This program's success in reducing recidivism and giving Delawareans the treatment they need is a reminder to all of us that strengthening our justice system so often does not mean putting more offenders in prison," said Governor Markell. "I thank everyone involved in the Drug Diversion Court over the past two decades for their dedication to the success of its participants and for making Delaware a national model for effective treatment and recovery."

As part of today's ceremony for the ten latest participants to successfully meet the program's requirements, Judge Jerome Herlihy, who now presides over the Drug Court, announced on the record that the criminal charge against each graduate was dismissed and presented them with certificates. The Superior Court reports that participants have recidivism rates around  32 – 35 percent in the two years following graduation.

“Over 20 years our drug court has faced a number of challenges due to the wide variety of drugs being abused or to which people are addicted,” said Judge Herlihy. “But now with more plentiful, stronger and cheaper heroin, the challenge to us is greater and more serious than probably ever before. This challenge is to all inside and outside the criminal justice system. It will not end soon.

“This Drug Court has enjoyed the support of all three branches of government since its inception. We are great full and look forward to this support continuing.”

According to the Superior Court, it offered one of the first Drug Diversion Courts in the United States. Today, there are now more than 2,500 such programs.

“There’s no doubt that we are up against a powerful enemy,” said Sen. Carper. “But there are ways to break the cycle of addiction, and the drug court is one of those ways. I’m proud that Delaware was among the first states to adopt a drug court – and many other states have followed because it not only works, but it’s the right thing to do.”

Established under the leadership of Judge Richard Gebelein in 1994 during then-Governor Carper’s administration, the Court has served nearly 5,900 people who have voluntarily entered its program, which partners with private treatment providers to direct individuals to the help they need over the period of six months to one year. Of the participants, about 3,800 have graduated after attending individual and group therapy session, receiving additional outpatient or inpatient services if required, consistently proving they are clean, and taking part in status conferences with the Court.