Testimony in Support of Funding for Evidence-based Addiction Treatment in Jails and Prisons in the Governor’s Budget

Dieter Tejada, JD  
Public Health Committee  
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Senator Abrams, Senator Lessers, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, Representative Young, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Dieter Tejada and I am a Justice Advocate Expert. I am a lawyer who has worked to provide legal services, spearheaded and collaborated on policy and legislative advocacy efforts, with a number of organizations. In our state I have worked with among others, the Office of the CT Public Defenders, CT’s Family ReEntry, and most recently with the Smart Justice Coalition of the ALCU-CT. I am also a recovered addict who has worked in the field of addiction treatment within the State. Among my efforts in this fields, I have helped to establish and facilitate a still-running addiction treatment program within a number of our States correctional facility—most notably in Bridgeport Correctional Center, a facility where, as a youth, I was formerly incarcerated. More recently because I am also a recovered addict and lawyer, I helped found and establish, and currently facilitate the first ever expansion meet of LCL-CT—the State’s official lawyers assistance program—which offers addiction treatment services to lawyers within the State. My offered testimony today will speak to the issue of funding for Evidence-based Addiction Treatment in Jails and Prisons in the Governor’s Budget. I write to express my unconditional support for the provision of such funding. In doing so I join a chorus of other likeminded advocate experts, including my esteemed colleagues from Yale Law School’s legislative advocacy group. I know how impressive—from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective—the evidence offered in support of this measure by the other experts you will hear from today is. The figure, numbers, and statistic they have provided you are particularly compelling, and if you have not yet had the chance, I strongly encourage you to dig in and closely read their testimony. I know that if you the answer to any questions on this funding become clear, when you add everything up and do the math. To avoid redundancy, I will not echo what my colleagues have so succinctly laid out, and add in anyway to the numbers that you have heard. Instead I will share a story that I hope will be helpful.

As I explained earlier, I helped to establish and facilitate an addiction treatment program within Bridgeport Correctional Center. This story revolves around an individual that I met during this venture. I will not share his name real name to protect his privacy, but J is a real person. When I met J he was incarcerated at BCC for a robbery. J attended the weekly rehabilitation meetings that I led, and over time we got to know each other pretty well. I heard his story, including the details of his addiction, and the crime that he committed. I heard about his family, including his daughter. When J and I first met he did was not interested in sobriety, but over time I saw this change. One day, maybe 6 months into my meeting him J explained that he was going to court for a sentencing hearing soon. Upon hearing this I asked him if he would mind if I attended the hearing. He said he would like that, so I did. I went to the hearing and after speaking to Js Attorney I decided that I would offer my opinion to J’s sentencing judge. My opinion was that J was an addict, and that his crime was predominantly a product of his addiction. I explained that I didn’t think that J would benefit from further incarceration, and that if he stayed clean he would not reoffend. As a result of my testimony J’s sentencing judge decided to give J a suspended sentence, rather than the extended prison sentence he had previously considered giving him. This happened almost a year ago. Recently I reconnected with J. He has been doing great. He has not reoffended, in anyway. In a conversation that I had with J’s mother she explained how different J has been since his release. How in sobriety he has become a hard-working chef, and doting father to
his daughter. I share this because I think it is a telling example of what can happen when addiction is treated. The knock on benefits that addiction treatment can offer are massive on both a number-based and human-based scale. Please give help give others the chance to experience the miracle that J is experiencing by supporting this integral funding.