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TESTIMONY 2013

S.B. 462

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of S.B. 462, which will ensure that each of Texas' specialty courts is operating effectively and efficiently, thus enhancing public safety outcomes and improving resource allocation throughout the specialty court system.

SPECIALTY COURTS HELP ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME

Specialty courts are designed to address crimes that are caused by addiction. In Texas, specialty courts are tailored to serve several specialized caseloads, including veterans, individuals with mental illnesses or mental disorders, individuals with DWI offenses, and individuals reentering the community following a period of incarceration.¹ National research demonstrates that **specialty courts are effective in increasing public safety, preventing recidivism, and treating chemical dependency.**² Serving these vulnerable individuals in specialty courts provides them with the opportunity to receive individualized treatment plans and supervision.

During the past 10 years, the number of specialty courts in Texas has grown from nine to approximately 140.³ To ensure that each of these courts is operating effectively and efficiently, and to identify and replicate model programs, it is critical to establish the performance tracking and accountability systems proposed in S.B. 462.

KEY FINDINGS

- Texas has approximately 140 specialty courts.
- Specialty courts are uniquely qualified to address addiction among veterans, individuals with mental illnesses and disorders, and individuals overcoming reentry barriers.
- Specialty courts safely reduce incarceration, and save money.
- Ensuring that specialty courts use best practices will improve criminal justice outcomes.
- Tracking performance will help inform future resource allocation.

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT S.B. 462 BY SENATOR HUFFMAN

S.B. 462 will increase cost savings and reduce recidivism by improving accountability and identifying best practices in Texas' specialty courts. Specifically, S.B. 462 will:

- Ensure specialty courts register with the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's office.
- Ensure specialty courts track and report their performance.
- Ensure specialty courts comply with best practices adopted by the Criminal Justice Division, which is guided by the Specialty Courts Advisory Council, composed of specialty court judges.
- Ensure the Criminal Justice Division develops outcome- and evidence-based practices for specialty courts, with the guidance of the Specialty Courts Advisory Council.

Citations

¹ Criminal Justice Advisory Council Report: Recommendations for Texas Specialty Courts, January 2013.

² Ibid.

³ "Huffman Files Legislation to Bring Transparency to Texas' Specialty Courts," Office of Texas State Senator Joan Huffman, press release, February 11, 2013.