



Karen Person & Jo Ann Finkenbinder, Co-Chairs, Criminal & Juvenile Justice Committee, League of Women Voters of Iowa

RE: DRUG COURTS IN IOWA

Adam Gregg, Dr. Roxann Ryan, Betty Andrews, David Boyd, Alan Ostergren, Keven McCarthy, Jerry Bartruff, John Hodges, and those involved in the Governor's Working Group on Justice Policy Reform
Governor Branstad Office, Capitol Building, 1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor's Working Group:

League of Women Voters of the United States has the position, *"The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses."* League of Women Voters of Iowa has a more extensive position on corrections and sentencing issues, and it includes the statement, *"The LWVIA supports legislation that considers offenders with special needs. Some examples of offenders with special needs are the mentally retarded, mentally ill, geriatric inmates, and medically needy."*

The costs are great for society when we incarcerate nonviolent offenders with drug and/or mental health issues. The rate of growth in budgetary spending for Corrections in Iowa over the last 25 years has outpaced that for other areas due to our growth in prison population (though Iowa has had a stable population). The monetary costs for families of the incarcerated are significant and include fees, fines, phone calls, and loss of family income with women bearing the brunt of the costs. The emotional/relationship costs for families are at least as great.

LWVIA supports use of Drug Courts. According to ***Reducing the U.S. Demand for Illegal Drugs***, a Report by the United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, June 2012, "Drug courts operate under a specialized model in which the judiciary, prosecution, defense, probation, law enforcement, mental health, social service, and treatment communities work together to help non-violent offenders find restoration in recovery and become productive citizens." Generally, drug courts apply quick sanctions for those who test positive for drug usage, and according to the report, they have proven to be highly effective in reducing recidivism. The 2012 Caucus Report supported the development of baseline standards for Drug Courts and that federal funding be contingent on utilization of the standards by Drug Courts.

The Legislative Service Agency (LSA) did a ***Cost-Benefit Analysis of Adult Drug Courts*** in December, 2013. This report indicated that most Drug Courts in Iowa were initiated as federal grants. Department of Corrections has indicated that probationers that successfully completed Adult Drug Courts are less likely to commit crimes than probationers that have not been in the program with a range of 24 to 82 percent recidivism variation by Judicial District. Similar offenders not in Adult Drug Court had a recidivism of 76 percent over the same 4.75 year period. However, though Drug Courts have proven to be cost effective in Iowa, there is an ongoing budget need to adequately fund the programs as CBC District Departments are unable to absorb the costs when federal grant money ends.

We would ask the Governor and Governor's Working Group to put additional funding into the state budget for continuation and expansion of Drug Courts and other research-based alternatives to incarceration in Iowa.

Sincerely yours,

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