

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS
FY 2013 Budget Justification
PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

The D.C. Courts are committed to rigorous program evaluation and the use of data to plan and assess initiatives and ensure effective services for the public in the District of Columbia. In addition to performance measures for each division, formal program evaluations are conducted on an ongoing basis. Current program evaluations are described in this section.

1. Fathering Reentry Court Information System

In 2010, the District of Columbia Superior Court Fathering Reentry Court (FRC) received grant funding through the Second Chance Act administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, to support on-going FRC service delivery and continuous quality improvement efforts. The FRC provides services to non-custodial male parents with outstanding child support obligations who are returning to the District of Columbia upon their release from incarceration. Services include enhancing the employment skills of program participants, monitoring their reentry into the workforce and currency of their support payments, and improving co-parenting relationships with the custodial parent(s) of their children. The voluntary, court supervised and sanctions-based program provides judicial oversight, case management services and employment counseling. Grant funds were used to support a dedicated program manager, contractual services, including employment counseling (to advise participants about job-seeking and secure continuous employment), continuous quality improvement through improved data collection and the development of an information management system.

A grant-funded evaluation of the FRC completed in a previous fiscal year identified the need for enhanced data management for the program, including an information system to track performance measures. To address this need, funding from the current Second Chance Act grant which had been intended for a program evaluation was re-programmed, with the consent of the grantor, to develop a database from which program performance information can be obtained. This information has the potential of serving as the basis of any future evaluation of the FRC. During the current grant year, key stakeholders of the FRC, with the Research and Development and Information Technology Divisions, have identified the requirements for the system and selected a contractor to develop a system to provide the needed performance information. It is expected that the system will be fully operational before the grant expires in September 2012.

2. East of the River Community Court

The Superior Court of the District of Columbia established the East of the River Community Court (ERCC) in September 2002 to address the high rates of poverty, crime, and disorder experienced in the Sixth and Seventh Police Districts. The ERCC adjudicates non-domestic violence, U.S. misdemeanor offenses, such as drug possession, sexual solicitation, unlawful entry and simple assault. With the support of both federal and local criminal justice agencies, ERCC attempts to identify the cases of eligible defendants and re-direct them from a strictly

adjudicatory function into diversion programs that focus on individual accountability, defendant treatment and services, and repairing the damage done to the community through punitive measures grounded in restorative justice (e.g., community service).

In 2009, after several years of operation, the Courts contracted to conduct an independent evaluation of the ERCC. Through the Courts' standard procurement process, which is modeled after federal procurement practices, Westat, a research firm, was selected to conduct an impact evaluation of the ERCC. The primary objective of this research, which is currently concluding, is to determine whether defendants involved in ERCC diversion programs have a lower rate of recidivism than a comparison group of defendants not involved in ERCC diversion programs.

The evaluation project has been underway since November 2009 and Westat completed a draft report that includes an analysis of re-offending activity that occurred in the District of Columbia, revealing some positive results for the ERCC. However, recognizing the geographic proximity of the ERCC service area to nearby Maryland and building upon the initial research, the Courts have requested of Westat a supplemental analysis to assess any offending that may have occurred in both the District and Maryland. The report is expected in March 2012.

3. Study to Examine Reoffending Activity of Post-Disposition Youth in the District of Columbia

Also with FY 2009 appropriated funds, the Courts entered into a contract with the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to conduct a study on the reoffending activity of post-disposition youth in the District of Columbia. This study examines juveniles who received a *probation* or *commitment* disposition in calendar year 2007 and examines the differences and similarities among each group. The primary goals of the study include determining the effects associated with probation vs. commitment dispositions, developing baseline information for the future assessment of performance measures, and assisting in the development of a business model to track youth reoffending in the future.

The study commenced in January 2010 and has a research and implementation timeline of 24 months. During the initial 12 month period, the NCJJ assessed the relative effects of probation vs. commitment dispositions on youths' reoffending behavior and developed baseline information. NCJJ provided a draft report of its findings based on information on District of Columbia re-offending activity. However, since the provision of the report, the Courts have obtained information from Maryland and Virginia and the District's Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services and have requested that NCJJ incorporate this information in its analysis and final report, which is expected to be completed in late March 2012.

Also, during Phase II of the project, months 12-24, the NCJJ assisted the Courts' Information Technology (IT), Social Services and Family Court Operations Divisions with the design and implementation of a business process and information system through which the Courts will be able to routinely track and report on the future reoffending behavior of youths in the District of Columbia. At present, NCJJ is collaborating with the Courts' Information Technology Division

to develop the required programming and web-interface for the system and verify initial output for the reoffending tracking system, which has an expected operational date of January 2013.

4. District of Columbia Family Treatment Court (FTC)

The Superior Court's Family Treatment Court (FTC) is a problem-solving court that was started in 2003 with the goal of establishing safe and permanent homes for children who have suffered neglect by their substance dependent mothers. The FTC provides services to mothers charged with neglect who volunteer to participate in intense substance abuse treatment in order to address the conditions that led to the alleged abuse or neglect of their child/children.

The FTC was designed to include several best practices such as: frequent judicial contact and oversight; a 15-month comprehensive substance abuse treatment program, involving both inpatient residential and outpatient community care components; enhanced parental skills training; and the capacity to live with up to four of one's children under the age of 10 in the treatment facility. The FTC is an alternative to the placement of children in foster care and, hopefully, improves stability for children by eliminating substance abuse of custodial parents.

In FY 2009, the Westat research firm was selected through the Courts' competitive bidding process to conduct an independent program evaluation. An 18 month study of the FTC was completed in June 2011. The evaluation reported that the program was implemented as designed and serves a limited, screened target population. It also identified areas for program improvement and future action.

Building upon the results of this study, the Courts' Research and Development Division currently is conducting additional research to assess outcomes for children whose mothers have completed the program. As part of this effort, the Courts are collaborating with the District's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to share information on each child whose mother was a subject of the initial research. In order to do so, CFSA has required that the Courts apply for review of the study's design and key data collection instruments by CFSA's internal Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of human subjects and confidentiality. The Courts submitted the completed application in October 2011. The application is currently under review by CFSA. Upon successful completion of the institutional review process, it is expected that child data will be available to the Courts for analysis and reporting.

5. Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Needs Assessment

In 2009, the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, the District's Office of Victim's Services, the Office of the Attorney General and the Women's Empowered Against Violence (WEAVE) Partnership were awarded a District-wide planning and implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women, Violence Against Women Act Grant Program to help support the delivery of supervised visitation and safe exchange services in situations involving domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault or stalking. The multi-year grant provides for planning in which stakeholders learn about promising practices

and program successes by participating in site visits and training, developing a mission statement and operating policies, conducting a needs assessment and coordinating community partners to increase outreach and service delivery.

The Courts' Research and Development Division executed an assessment design that included investigating potential geographic areas of need and learning from stakeholders about existing services and referral resources for victims of domestic violence. In June 2011, the findings from the assessment were made available to the grant project director and planning team for use by team and its stakeholders to address the remaining components of the grant, including modifying, if needed, practices, enhancing coordination of services and expanding the range of services offered through the current program.