



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**SUBMITTED BY ANA YÁÑEZ-CORREA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION**

**REGARDING SENATE BILL 1780**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS**

**APRIL 30, 2007**

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ana Yáñez-Correa. I am the Executive Director of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony regarding Senate Bill 1780.

Drug courts are a proven effective diversion program for individuals convicted of illicit drug use. The programs have been highly successful and immensely popular in Texas, yet drug courts often struggle to secure funding. Given drug courts' proven success at eliminating addiction and reducing criminal recidivism, Texas must ensure that funding for these programs is sufficient and reliable.

### **WHAT ARE DRUG COURT PROGRAMS?**

A drug court diversion program involves intensive interaction between offenders and judges, more comprehensive supervision than regular probation, routine drug testing, immediate sanctions for violations, and meaningful incentives for good behavior. The design and structure of drug court programs are developed at the local level to reflect the unique strengths, circumstances, and capacities of each community.

### **WHAT DOES S.B. 1780 DO?**

While current law allows district attorneys to use 10 percent of money gained from criminal asset forfeiture to fund drug prevention programs, they are not mandated to do so, nor are they mandated to assist with funding drug courts. Senate Bill 1780 by Chairman Whitmire would create a new funding source for drug courts in Texas by requiring that district attorneys in a county with a drug court program allocate 10 percent of asset forfeiture funds towards maintenance and operation costs for the program.

### **ADVANTAGES OF DRUG COURT PROGRAMS:**

- **Drug court programs successfully reduce drug abuse and recidivism.** Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that individuals participating in drug court programs are 19-44% less likely to recidivate upon completion.
- **Drug courts are far less expensive than incarceration.** Treatment programs cost on average nearly ten times less than incarceration. Furthermore, treatment expansion can avoid costly new prison construction necessitated by drug offender incarceration and recidivism, saving Texas taxpayers \$520 million.
- **Drug court programs will help resolve the prison over-crowding crisis.** Approximately 22% of Texas prisoners are incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses. Diverting these individuals into drug court programs would preserve much needed prison beds for dangerous criminals.
- **Drug courts encourage personal responsibility.** Drug court programs hold participants responsible for paying program and court costs to the extent that they are financially able to do so.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this committee and to offer our organization's ideas about this important issue. I would also like to commend Chairman Whitmire for his energy and leadership in finding effective ways to manage low-level drug offenders. We hope that this committee will pass his bill and reinforce the State's commitment to a proven effective program.