

Comments of the Attorney General on H 213

The Attorney General strongly supports this bill.

To promote public safety, fairness, and justice it's time to break the cycle of recidivism that's too common in Vermont's criminal justice system. We must spend our tax dollars more efficiently by building a correctional system that corrects behavior, instead of supervising, housing, and releasing individuals at great cost only to see many people return to the system. The implementation of a statewide DUI and Drug Treatment Courts is an essential step in the right direction.

DUI and Drug Treatment Courts will more effectively protect public safety by addressing underlying causes of unlawful behavior, including addiction and mental health issues. A safe community is one where people are sober, are healthy, are stable, are housed, and hopefully are working. Public safety is not protected by shuffling people through the corrections system only to see them continue with potentially dangerous behavior. These Courts will appropriately prioritize high-risk and high-needs individuals who have caused their communities, families, and the justice system the most stress.

DUI and Drug Treatment Courts in every county in Vermont will lead to fairer and more uniform outcomes. Nobody in our State should be denied access to the most effective criminal justice outcomes simply because of where they live or where they get in trouble. Every DUI and Drug Treatment Court will follow and promote standard protocols following national best practices standards. Vermonters everywhere in the state deserve the benefit of programs that will reduce recidivism and protect public safety.

DUI and Drug Treatment Courts will serve justice by helping to break the generational cycle of poverty that keeps people from safety, stability, jobs, and success. Treatment courts will address root causes of criminal behavior—and in doing so may reduce other stresses on communities and the justice system. Addiction and mental illness are often factors in the abuse and neglect of children, and courts dedicated to addressing these issues may reduce rates of abuse and neglect. These courts will keep our communities safer and allow for a thriving and successful state.

Issues for the Committee's consideration:

- Adopt language ensuring that the Courts will complement the work of other alternatives including pretrial services and diversion, and ensure communication between the new courts and these existing alternatives
- Adopt language ensuring that the Courts will address victim needs
- Adopt language encouraging adherence to risk/need/responsivity and restorative justice principles
- Address concerns regarding the prioritization of private gifts in the Special Fund.
- Address concerns regarding the potential 15% budgetary penalty in FY 2022.