

**U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
“Warning: The Growing Danger of Prescription Drug Diversion”**

April 14, 2011

Summary of Testimony of Dan Harrison, Drug Court Graduate

My name is Dan Harrison. In September 1995, I took a horrible fall at a construction site. My fall not only resulted in a severe back injury, but it led to a life of addiction. The drugs are what got me through the day. I never had to go back to a doctor's office after my initial injury. I developed such a strong relationship with my doctors that I would only need to call and they would refill my prescription with no questions asked.

In October of 2008 I decided I wanted to fight for full custody of my two daughters. I decided to call Child Protective Services (CPS) and after an investigation the children were removed from their mother's care. But when the case worker showed up unannounced to my house she saw my "pharmacy". The only way I would ever get custody of my daughters was to get help. I entered the Family Preservation Court, otherwise known as Family Dependency Treatment Court.

The Family Preservation Court (FPC) applies the Drug Court model to child welfare cases that involve an allegation of child abuse or neglect related to substance abuse. The FPC seeks to do what is in the best interest of the family by providing a safe and secure environment for the child while intensively intervening and treating the parent's substance abuse and other co-morbidity issues. Since graduating I have learned that there are over 2,500 Drug Courts, including over 300 Family Dependency Treatment Courts in the United States. I am humbled to know that over 120,000 addicted people a year have the opportunity for treatment and restoration in these courts and I hope that someday they are available to everyone who needs them. These courts have been proven to cut crime up to 45% and produce up to 27\$ for every 1\$ invested.

I now have full custody of both my daughters and I am an active parent in their lives. I am able to be my daughters' role model and they now look up to me. For the first time in their lives, my daughters now say, "Dad, I am proud of you."

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Testimony of Dan Harrison, Drug Court Graduate

Thank you Chairwoman Bono Mack, Ranking Member Butterfield, and distinguished Members of the Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade Subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Dan Harrison. I am a tribal member of the Muskogee Creek Nation in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. I currently reside in Palm Springs, California where I have been for the past 20 years. I have worked as a structural iron worker and achieved apprenticeship status for iron work. In September 1995, I took a horrible fall at a construction site. My fall not only resulted in a severe back injury, but it led to a life of addiction. After injuring my back, I went onto disability for 2 months when I finally went to an orthopedic surgeon I was told that I would need to have surgery which could result in never achieving 100% mobility. I chose not to have the surgery and developed my own solution of physical therapy and pain medication. After 90 days, I stopped going to physical therapy and started drinking to intensify the effects of the pain medication. As the days went on my drinking and opiate use increased and my life started spiraling out of control.

During this time, my wife and I separated, and shared custody of our two daughters. In 1999, I remarried and soon after had a baby boy. This all occurred while I had a severe dependence on opiates and alcohol. The drugs are what got me through the day. I

never had to go back to a doctor's office after my initial injury. I developed such a strong relationship with my doctors that I would only need to call and they would refill my prescription with no questions asked. I would go into a local emergency room where the doctor would see me and wave me back for my regular pain injections. I rarely had to resort to the streets to get my next fix. Depending on what type of narcotic I wanted and the method of administration of the drug resulted in which doctor I would call.

In October of 2008 I decided I wanted to fight for full custody of my two daughters. I felt that their mother was not caring for them the way I felt they should be cared for. I decided to call Child Protective Services (CPS) and after the investigation they were removed from their mother's care. When the case worker showed up unannounced to my house she saw my "pharmacy". I had two cabinets full of prescription medication. When confronted, I admitted to recent use of Oxycontin, Morphine, Lortabs, Demerol, dilaudid and Marijuana. After hearing myself admit to the amount of drugs in my system and seeing the case worker's response, I knew it was time to make a change. The only way I would ever get custody of my daughters was to get help. I entered the Family Preservation Court, otherwise known as Family Dependency Treatment Court.

The Family Preservation Court (FPC) applies the Drug Court model to child welfare cases that involve an allegation of child abuse or neglect related to substance abuse. The FPC seeks to do what is in the best interest of the family by providing a safe and secure

environment for the child while intensively intervening and treating the parent's substance abuse and other co-morbidity issues. This approach also results in better collaboration between agencies and better compliance with treatment and other family court orders necessary to improve child protective case outcomes.

Since graduating I have learned that there are over 2,500 Drug Courts, including over 300 Family Dependency Treatment Courts in the United States. I am humbled to know that over 120,000 addicted people a year have the opportunity for treatment and restoration in these courts and I hope that someday they are available to everyone who needs them. These courts have been proven to cut crime up to 45%ⁱ and produce up to 27\$ for every 1\$ investedⁱⁱ.

When I first entered the Family Preservation Court, I had not accepted my problem and I was very angry at myself for calling CPS since I was the one being sent to treatment. However, after my intake and sharing my history with the FPC counselor, I realized how bad things had gotten. Through the FPC, I was able to get help with setting my daughters, and myself, up with counseling and obtain guidance on educating my daughters about addiction. I participated in parenting courses that taught me how to effectively communicate with my children and how create healthy boundaries. I was given support from my counselors and peers throughout my struggles with the reunification process. In March 2010, I graduated from the Family Preservation Court.

Today I am thankful that I called CPS. Without CPS intervening and getting me enrolled in Family Preservation Court, I would not be in my daughters' lives today. I now have full custody of both my daughters and I am an active parent in their lives. I participate in ongoing counseling with my daughters and I am able to communicate honestly and openly with them. I received my GED and worked in social services at my reservation running family "talking" circles for youth and their families. I also work for a fire prevention and suppression program where I supervise 11 workers. Now, I am the co-owner and consultant for Power Shaver, a GSA approved energy saving system. Thanks to the Family Preservation Court, I am able to make decisions and better choices for my family. I have since come back to the Family Preservation Court as a mentor by co-leading parent support groups and mentoring other families going through the reunification process.

I am able to be my daughters' role model and they now look up to me. For the first time in their lives, my daughters now say, "Dad, I am proud of you."

ⁱ Aos et al. (2006). *Evidence-based public policy options to reduce future prison construction, criminal justice costs, and crime rates*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy; Lattimer (2006). *A meta-analytic examination of drug treatment courts: Do they reduce recidivism?* Canada Dept. of Justice; Lowenkamp et al. (2005). Are drug courts effective: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Community Corrections, Fall*, 5-28; Shaffer (2006). *Reconsidering drug court effectiveness: A meta-analytic review*. Las Vegas, NV: Dept. of Criminal Justice, University of Nevada; Wilson, et al. (2006). A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 2, 459-487.

ⁱⁱ Carey, S.M., Finigan, M., Crumpton, D., & Waller, M. (2006). California drug courts: Outcomes, costs and promising practices: An overview of phase II in a statewide study, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, SARC Supplement 3*, 345-356; Loman, L.A. (2004). A cost-benefit analysis of the St. Louis City Adult Felony Drug Court, St. Louis, MO: Institute of Applied Research; Finigan, M., Carey, S.M., & Cox, A.

(2007). *The impact of a mature drug court over 10 years of operation: Recidivism and costs*. Portland, OR: NPC Research. Available at www.npcresearch.com; Barnoski, R., & Aos, S. (2003). *Washington State's drug courts for adult defendants: Outcome evaluation and cost-benefit analysis*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.