

Missouri Treatment Court Programs Reflect Great Collaborative Success

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The Missouri judiciary, legislature and agency partners have a decades-long history of collaborative “problem-solving” initiatives to address and respond to the needs of the state and local communities in combatting impacts of substance use disorder for individuals involved in the criminal justice system and the corresponding impacts on children, youth, families and communities. These collective efforts to develop treatment courts across the state have proven over time to serve as a foundation for building improved outcomes for those impacted by the Missouri criminal justice system.

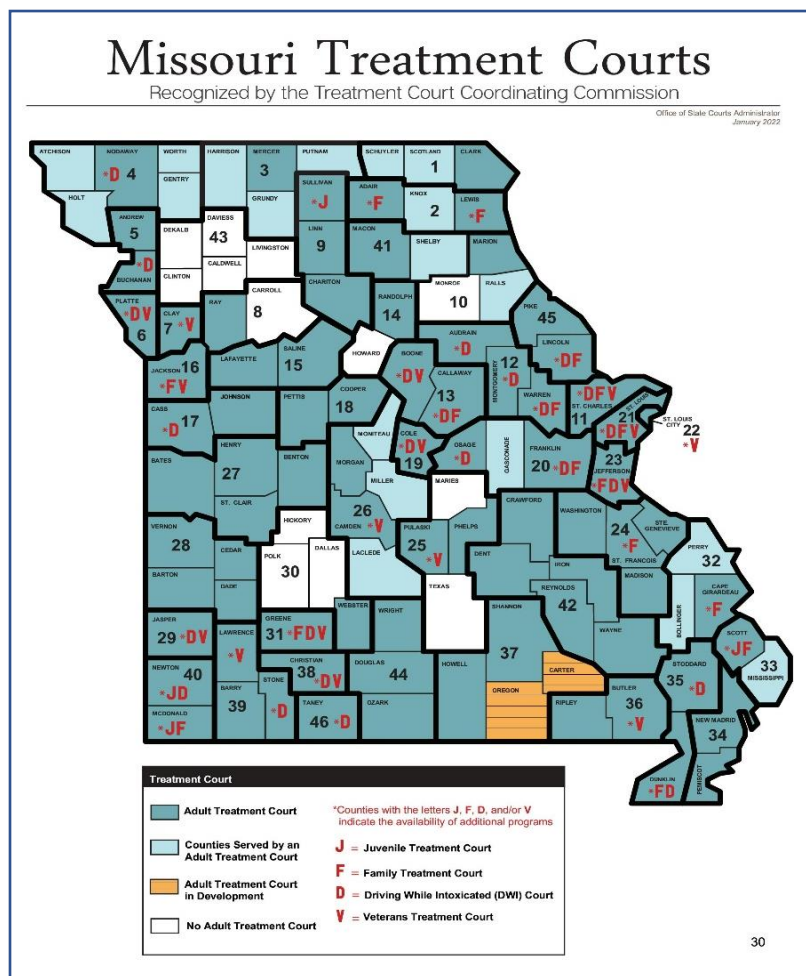
When Missouri Chief Justice Paul C. Wilson delivered the annual State of the Judiciary address in March 2022 during a joint session of the Missouri General Assembly in Jefferson City, he highlighted the state’s treatment courts as “one of the greatest collaborative successes showing what is possible when the three branches work together with creativity and a commitment to serving Missourians better.”

Missouri’s first treatment court was established in 1993 in Jackson County, which encompasses much of Kansas City. As the county drug court began to prove its worth in reducing recidivism, the state legislature in 1998 codified treatment courts. Three years later, the legislature established a statewide resources fund to support and expand treatment courts in local jurisdictions as well as a commission – now known as the Treatment Courts Coordinating Commission – to provide ongoing oversight and distribution of the funding appropriated by the legislature.

In 2018, the Missouri General Assembly acted again to, enacting comprehensive treatment court legislation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Missouri’s treatment court programs. In part, this legislation recognized the various types of treatment courts and authorized the state’s circuit courts to establish their own treatment court divisions focused on local needs and resources. It also added representatives for prosecuting attorneys and defense counsel to the coordinating commission, which is chaired by a Supreme Court of Missouri judge and comprised of other state judges and directors of the administrative branch agencies serving public safety, mental health and social services.

The 2018 legislation further empowered the commission to establish standards and practices for treatment courts aimed at creating uniform and informed policies and practices consistent with recognized best and evidence-based practices.

There are currently treatment court programs in 45 of the 46 judicial circuits in Missouri serving participants in 101 of the state's 115 local jurisdictions, including: 80 adult treatment programs, 16 veterans treatment courts, 23 designated DWI courts, 15 family treatment courts and four juvenile treatment courts. Since their inception in Missouri, treatment courts have had more than 25,000 graduates statewide and more than 1,000 drug-free babies born to treatment court program participants. Missouri's local treatment courts are supported by state-paid treatment court administrators and staff with the Supreme Court of Missouri's Office of State Courts Administrator to provide technical assistance and other support related to data collection and fiscal oversight.



Continuous improvement has remained a hallmark of the Missouri treatment courts. For example, recent efforts and priority projects so far in 2022 include:

- Integrating increased outcome tracking and data collection capabilities as part of the developing Show-Me Courts statewide case management system;
- Using an additional 27 percent of the fiscal 2022 funding allocations to expand treatment court programs by supporting an increased number of program participants and local providers to serve them;

- Implementing the statewide treatment court standards the coordinating commission approved in January 2020;
- Launching an equity and inclusion project to improve recruitment, retention and graduation rates of African American men and women in Missouri treatment courts;
- Increasing collaboration throughout court communities to facilitate sequential intercept mapping; and
- Enhancing other judicial leadership and engagement efforts.

Another current focus for Missouri is expanding treatment court resources for veterans. As Chief Justice Wilson explained during his recent state of the judiciary address – despite the number of military installations in Missouri and the high percentage of service members choosing to make Missouri their home after leaving active duty – the state’s veterans treatment courts serve only a third of local jurisdictions. Because “the burdens of military service do not magically disappear the moment a veteran leaves active duty” Chief Justice Wilson acknowledged the continued challenges for veterans may manifest in mental health issues, substance abuse and conduct leading to involvement in the justice system.

“Our choice is clear,” Chief Justice Wilson told the legislators. “We can view ... veterans solely in terms of their conduct, or we can look at the context from which their conduct arises and see whether treatment and other forms of support can produce a better outcome, both for the veterans and for all of us they have served.” He talked about the impact veterans and active-duty soldiers have as mentors in treatment courts, noting, “No one can help a veteran like someone who’s walked a mile – and probably a thousand miles – in their combat boots.” He urged the legislators to work with the courts to increase access to these successful services.

In line with the chief justice’s theme of continuing collaboration is the “Missouri Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their Family Members.” Coordinated by the governor’s office and department of mental health, this effort includes multiple agencies and organizations working collaboratively on numerous projects to screen for suicide risk, promote connectedness and improvements in care transitions, and increase safety planning to aid veterans. Tangible results so far include notification forms for state agencies and a tool kit to help identify military status so

appropriate agencies can provide information regarding available services. Expected to come soon are training modules focused on safety planning for the military-connected community.

According to the Veteran's Administration, 17 veterans die by suicide every day and Missouri ranks significantly higher than the national veterans suicide rate. To help reverse this tragic trend, Missouri's judicial branch will continue to partner in this collaborative effort and stands ready to build better supports, treatment opportunities and care for our veterans through the treatment court process. As Chief Justice Wilson noted, "we owe it to these men and women as the very least we can do to honor the sacrifices they've made."

Additional information about Missouri's treatment court programs may be found online through <https://www.courts.mo.gov/page.jsp?id=321> or by contacting Beverly Newman, court programs manager for the state courts administrator's office, at Bev.Newman@courts.mo.gov.