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For more information, contact:

Leah Gurowitz

202/879-1700

D.C. SUPERIOR COURT RELEASES COMMUNITY COURT STUDY RESULTS

In 2002, the East of the River Community Court (ERCC) was developed as a pilot community court. The ERCC presided over misdemeanor cases (excluding domestic violence cases) originating in the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) 6th and 7th districts. As an alternative to traditional case processing, eligible defendants were offered an opportunity to voluntarily participate in ERCC diversion programming. Specifically, the ERCC provided an opportunity for defendants with minor offenses to make restitution to the community, accept responsibility for their behavior, obtain access to necessary treatment and educational services and divert a criminal conviction.

In 2010, the D.C. Superior Court commissioned a study to determine the effectiveness of the ERCC. The study, conducted by Westat, focused on 4,046 defendants entering ERCC in 2007, 2008, and 2009. The study examined the number of defendants entering the ERCC, the rate of successful ERCC diversion completions, and reoffending activity in the District of Columbia and Maryland for approximately 12 months post-disposition.

The principal study findings include:

- Between 2007 and 2009, 4,046 defendants entered the ERCC. Of those defendants entering the ERCC, 21% were involved in ERCC diversion programs (p. 23).
- Of the defendants involved in ERCC diversion programs, 60% successfully completed their program (p. 32).
- The most common charges associated with defendants entering the ERCC were misdemeanor drug charges (p. 25).

In order to examine how effective the ERCC was at reducing reoffending, defendants who successfully completed their diversion programs were compared with a similar group of defendants not offered diversion programs whose offense originated in MPD 5th district. The ERCC defendants and MPD 5th district defendants were matched on the following characteristics: gender, age, race, D.C. or MD resident, criminal history, severity of offense, and maximum severity score for the most serious offense (p. 57-58). The principal findings related to reoffending include:

- Overall, reoffending was substantially and significantly lower among ERCC defendants when compared to MPD 5th District defendants (p. viii).
- While the defendant's case was ongoing, defendants in the ERCC had a 60% lower reoffending rate than defendants in the comparison group (p. 58).
- During the 12 months post-disposition, defendants successfully completing ERCC had a 42% lower reoffending rate than defendants in the comparison group (p. 59).
- During the entire study time period (case processing and post-disposition), defendants successfully completing an ERCC diversion program were about 50% as likely (or about half as likely) to reoffend when compared to MPD 5th district defendants (p. viii).

Based on the success of the ERCC, the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia reconfigured the criminal division's misdemeanor calendars to follow the community court model. Starting in January, 2012 the D.C. Superior Court now has dedicated community courts for the following MPD districts: 1D, 2D/4D, 3D, 5D, 6D and 7D. The establishment of community courts in each MPD district is one example of the D.C. Superior Court's commitment to providing access to justice, enhancing public safety and assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders.