

Testimony Regarding Engrossed Senate Bill 2002:

I ask the House to reconsider the decision to take the Budget for treatment Courts out of this bill. This appears to be antithetical to the legislatures clear desire given a number bill seeking criminal justice reform and reducing prison population, as opposed to expanding the prison to house individuals sentenced to prison. The removal is reflected in the Agency worksheet that appears as written testimony of Alex Cronquist Document number 37184, discussed during committee work on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2025.

The \$373,476 is beneficial to ensuring the protection of the public, if the Legislature is not going to expand the State Penitentiary, then there needs to be alternatives to incarceration that will help reduce recidivism. One such alternative that is specifically related to Morton County is the Mental Health Court sought to be created in the South-Central Judicial District (SCJD). The SCJD Mental Health Court seeks \$85,164. That amount reflects a clear reinvestment of taxpayer finances back into the community for community safety. The importance of the collaboration between Criminal Justice Systems and Mental Health Systems is clear.<sup>1</sup> Current Research supports a trend on the effectiveness of Mental Health Courts on reducing recidivism.<sup>2</sup>

I can certainly appreciate the approach to reducing taxpayer's burden by limiting spending. I certainly understand the Judiciary focusing on certain items and their priority listing as provided to the Senate. The issue is the priority items essentially amount to "quality of life improvements", which is great, but that is routine and from what I can tell amounts to the bare minimum for the judiciary to continue to function effectively. (Document number 33045). It is rare that the three branches of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8844546/>

<sup>2</sup> (PDF) [Assessing the Effectiveness of Mental Health Courts in Reducing Recidivism: A Systematic Review with Meta-analysis](https://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/9275/1/CMSarteschiAug2009Dissertation.pdf) SEE ALSO: <https://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/9275/1/CMSarteschiAug2009Dissertation.pdf>

government can agree on something, reducing recidivism is one of those things. Yet, the Legislature demands slashes to the Judiciary's proposed budget to keep only the bare minimum increases for effective functioning, so that our Court system can continue to limp on until the next biennium. The treatment courts may be a "want" and not a "need". However, it is a want that will do good, a want whose effectiveness can be reevaluated in the coming years. I want to make it clear that reinvesting into the criminal justice system is anything but wasted funds as it serves to keep communities safe. The \$85,164, would go to keep individuals in the South-Central Judicial District safe, and to provide diversionary resources to address ever-increasing crime. Removal of the funds for the South-Central Judicial District Mental Health Court was an understandable mistake.

CONCLUSION:

I urge the House to undo the mistake of the Senate and add back in the \$373,476 to the Budget for the 3 new treatment courts, or at the very least consider adding back the \$85,164 for the SCJD. If the Legislature wants to take a real step to reduce recidivism, to address crime rates, to keep communities safe there are few options, 1) Expand the State Penitentiary or 2) Fund treatment courts. I would urge the Legislature to consider the options before it.

Respectfully Submitted; March 5th 2025:

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