



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

### **Problem-Solving Courts**

Many “problem-solving courts” have gone into operation in Pennsylvania in recent years.

These courts focus on specific types of crimes that often are interwoven with social problems such as driving under the influence, drug and drug-related offenses and crimes committed by people with mental illness. These types of crimes—particularly drug-related crimes—have a major impact on the courts and the prisons.

The goal of problem-solving courts is to supervise the treatment and rehabilitation of carefully screened and selected defendants who are willing to try to change their behavior. Instead of a jail sentence, defendants are given counseling, treatment for their addictions or illnesses, educational assistance and healthcare support. The progress of each defendant assigned to a rehab program through a problem-solving court is strictly monitored by a judge. Success depends on a partnership between the defendant and the court in a cooperative rehabilitation effort.

Defendants who complete their court-supervised programs and “graduate” are rewarded in several ways. The charges that brought them to court are dismissed. Their criminal records can be expunged and they are given a chance at a fresh start.

Problem-solving courts benefit the public in several ways:

- They provide alternative correctional programs for non-violent offenders, thereby helping to reduce prison overcrowding and save costs.
- Through rehabilitation, they reduce the rate of recidivism, a pattern of repeat offenses common to defendants with substance abuse and behavioral problems.

- They can transform self-destructive individuals, who put a drain on society, into productive citizens who can make a contribution.

Problem-solving courts in Pennsylvania include adult drug courts, juvenile drug courts, DUI courts, mental health courts and veterans courts.

The growth of problem-solving courts began in 2005 after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court approved a template for the operation of adult drug courts throughout the Commonwealth. Utilizing this template, drug court judges work collaboratively with prosecutors, defense attorneys, drug treatment professionals, law enforcement officials and social service agencies to assist defendants in conquering their drug addictions.

Defendants are required to undergo intensive treatment and counseling, submit to random drug testing, and regularly appear before the drug court judge. Those who fail to comply with program requirements are subject to sanctions that can include imprisonment.