



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Pennsylvania's problem-solving courts surpass century mark

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania now has more than 100 problem-solving courts across the Commonwealth — and counting.

During the first few days of January, Cambria and Northampton counties each launched a mental health court and Erie County began a veterans court. The three joined 98 existing problem-solving courts across the Commonwealth. Other counties have programs in the discussion or planning stages.

Problem-solving courts divert nonviolent offenders from jail if they comply with treatment requirements and other fixed benchmarks developed by the programs.

Studies show problem-solving courts are less costly than jailing offenders and do not compromise public safety. The programs also offer treatment and enhance coping skills for participants. Program graduates also have been shown to be less likely to repeat their crimes.

“Saving money is essential, but what’s equally important is the opportunity to improve lives and strengthen communities,” Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Thomas G. Saylor said. “These courts offer a way out of a vicious cycle of repeat crimes and jail by connecting non-violent offenders into programs that improve lives and communities.”

The problem-solving courts are a collaborative effort, headed by a judge, and include a prosecutor, a defense counsel, a treatment provider, law enforcement and a court coordinator. Such programs are voluntary for the judicial district and largely dependent on county resources.

Pennsylvania’s problem-solving court programs include adult and juvenile drug courts, DUI courts, mental health courts and veterans courts. Pennsylvania’s first problem-solving court was launched in Philadelphia in 1997.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court established an accreditation program for problem-solving adult drug and DUI courts in 2011 to recognize those that have demonstrated proven performance standards and guidelines. Pennsylvania has 13 accredited courts.

For more information about Pennsylvania’s problem-solving courts: <http://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs>

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