

# The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts

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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Friends of Drug Courts Expands to become Statewide Nonprofit to Help Combat Growing Substance Abuse Crisis**

**NORTH HAVERHILL, NH** - The organization formerly known as the Friends of the Grafton County Drug Court has notified the New Hampshire Attorney General that it is expanding into a statewide tax-exempt charitable nonprofit organization and becoming The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts whose mission will be to support all established New Hampshire Drug Courts. Because Drug Courts are designed to work along with the criminal justice system offering defendants whose offenses are substance abuse driven an alternative sentencing option, The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts will work to enhance those programs by providing additional privately raised funding for incentives as well as related education and training.

"The establishment of this statewide nonprofit comes at a critical time as New Hampshire is working hard to formulate a comprehensive, coordinated response to confront the growing heroin and drug epidemic crisis that is raging across our state effecting the lives of family members and friends alike," stated Edward Rajsteter, President of The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts ("The Friends").

"Our mission is to help provide funding to enhance ancillary programs for drug court participants and to help fund participant incentives as well as related education and training. Our goal is to enhance county drug court programs. Currently drug court programs are funded only through county taxes. There is a strong move for the State to fund part of each drug court's operating budget. The Friends fundraising will not replace state and county funding of drug court programs, but rather enhance taxpayer funding."

The original Friends of Grafton County Drug Court was formed in 2009 and was the first such nonprofit in New England. Its focus was the Grafton County Drug Court program. The expansion into a statewide nonprofit organization was developed through ongoing discussions with Chief Justice Tina Nadeau and other stakeholders who are working together to put in place programs to help halt

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the growing heroin and drug crisis that is touching all New Hampshire communities across all social and economic sectors.

"We are building upon our successful Grafton County Friends model and making it a statewide initiative," stated Ed Rajsteter. "It's just not enough to have state and county governments funding drug courts; we need to create an effective public-private partnership. We need to have individuals, corporations and all community sectors working together and the new Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts is the bridge to involve all stakeholders in this beneficial statewide program."

The Drug Court alternative sentencing program is a nationwide program with a proven record of success that achieves real results in combating drug and alcohol addiction and returning the participant as a productive, employed members of his or her community.

Currently there are six established drug courts in New Hampshire in Belknap, Cheshire, Grafton, Hillsborough, Rockingham and Strafford counties. Drug Courts are extremely successful in rehabilitating participants who graduate from the 12 to 24 month programs. The recidivism rate, the rate at which offenders get sent back to jail for drug court graduates in Grafton and Strafford counties is around 22% as compared to prisoners statewide with a recidivism rate of close to 40% and nearly 60% nationally. There are more than 2,900 drug court programs throughout the nation.

"The heroin and substance abuse crisis is the most pressing public health and safety challenge facing our state, an 'all-hands-on-deck' moment that requires us all to work together," Governor Maggie Hassan said. "Expanding drug courts is a critical part of a comprehensive approach to combat this crisis, and I applaud the Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts and their commitment to partnering with state and local governments to support drug courts; representing the best of the Granite State's collaborative spirit. I remain committed to working with legislators to develop a statewide drug court funding plan, as well as increasing treatment capacity - through measures like the reauthorization of our bipartisan health care plan - in order to ensure that those who go through our drug courts have access to treatment services."

New Hampshire State Senator David Boutin said "The heroin epidemic and substance abuse problems in New Hampshire have reached proportions that none of us anticipated and it's time for us to work together across party lines to address the problem. I am co-sponsoring legislation that will provide state-funding for drug courts, which are designed to more effectively reduce crime because they combine treatment with accountability. We all want to maintain the New Hampshire advantage and make our state a safe place to live and work. Community efforts like the Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts demonstrate the commitment of our citizens and community leaders to tackle the heroin epidemic at all levels."

Chief Justice Tina Nadeau lent her support for the new Friends and stated, "If we want to reduce crime, save money and return people to the community as contributing members, then we need to be more creative about what we do with those offenses who have drug addiction and end up recycling through our jails and prisons. Drug court is one of those options we can use to address the addiction crisis in our state and to make our state more safe. I am thrilled that this committed group of active community leaders wants to support a better way to address crime and addiction."

Tym Rourke, Director, Substance Use Disorders Grantmaking and Strategic Initiatives, for the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, lent his support and stated, "Drug Courts are a critical part of the needed system to support better treatment and recovery for those with a substance use disorder who enter the justice system. While new efforts are moving to provide sustainable public funding to support drug courts, communities have a role to play in ensuring people have access to supports as well. The new Friends expansion will help to give people a way to assist people reentering back into their community."

Alex Casale, Strafford County Drug Court Coordinator and State Coordinator, who is working to help create the new Friends of the New Hampshire Drug Courts, stated, "Drug Courts are an effective proven intervention. It's the blending of the strict supervision of the courts, treatment, probation, parole, drug testing and case management that make a Drug Court successful. Once a county has a drug court it's very difficult to go back to the old way of doing business in the criminal justice system and the new Friends play an important role in that success."

"The establishment of The Friends as a statewide tax-exempt charitable nonprofit will make us the first such statewide organization in the nation. As such, The Friends will be expanding its board of directors and have board members representing each of the established drug courts in the state as well as seeking corporate board members to help grow our fundraising and help increase our financial support to the existing six drug courts operating in New Hampshire," stated Ed Rajsteter.

"We will be working closely with the New Hampshire Attorney General's office and the IRS to get the statewide nonprofit operational as quickly as possible to help support the state's drug courts," continued Mr. Rajsteter.

During the past six years, the Friends of Grafton County Drug Court raised over \$50,000 to enhance the program funding from Grafton County taxpayers. 50 participants have successfully graduated from the Grafton County drug court program.

Membership in the Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts is open to all residents. The Friends are actively seeking both corporate, individual and youth members as well as seeking interested individuals to serve on its new board of directors. To obtain more information about The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts or to become a member, please contact The Friends at [friendsofnhdugcts@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofnhdugcts@gmail.com).

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