



**League of Women Voters
New Hampshire**

LWVNH.org

Feb. 11, 2016

To: Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Re: **SB 533** relative to drug law enforcement and penalties, insurance coverage for substance use disorders, a statewide drug court grant program, and drug abuse prevention; and making appropriations therefor.

The League of Women Voters New Hampshire supports the establishment of a statewide drug court program and making provision for increased substance abuse treatment. We urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on this bill.

Our position stems from the three-year study LWVNH conducted on the impact of incarceration of women in NH, the impact not only on the offenders and their children but also on the state and the taxpayers. We conducted this study from 2009 to 2012, and we have continued to update our findings and our involvement. I currently serve on the Citizens Advisory Board to the NH Correctional Facility for Women, where many of the inmates are incarcerated because of substance abuse related crimes.

We supports many parts of this bill, including provisions for increased access to treatment for substance abuse. The purpose of our testimony right now, however, is the provision for a grant program to establish drug courts throughout NH.

As we conducted our study, in 2011 I believe, the League's study committee members were granted extraordinary behind-the-scenes access to the Grafton county drug court. We also attended two graduation ceremonies and were moved by the comments of those who completed the program and their families, finding successful paths for themselves. Since then some changes to the program have resulted in improved completion rates for women offenders, which makes us very happy.

The fiscal note has not been completed for this bill, but the text itself explains some of the expenses that will be incurred by the state and counties. It does not point out the offset in reduced incarceration costs. No one can cite those numbers with certainty, and the costs of county and state incarceration vary. It seems logical, however, that reducing incarceration costs will effect savings that more than make up for drug court grants. As ballpark figures, please consider the following:

Prison costs average close to \$35,000 per year per inmate. Assume four drug offenders are sentenced to two year sentences. Cost to the state is \$280,000. At the current rate of recidivism for non-violent crimes, two of those offenders are likely to return within three years. Assume two more years of incarcerated and we have added \$140,000 for a total of \$420,000 for four offenders.

Contrast this with drug court, where the average cost per offender is \$8,000 to \$10,000. The recidivism rate is less than one in four. Not everyone succeeds at drug court, but if our four offenders did, and only one re-offended and was then sentenced, the costs for those four people would still be no more than \$36,000 for the drug court process plus \$70,000 for a two-year sentence for the one who recidivated. Total cost just over \$100,000, not nearly the half a million dollars if all had been incarcerated.

Consider also that while those four people are incarcerated, if one is a woman her minor children may be in foster care, also costing the state money. If the offenders instead participate in drug court, the family stays together, the offenders hold jobs to support themselves and their families and they pay taxes. It is hard to compare those figures because so much of drug court can be a life-altering experience beyond the estimated costs.

The League believes that saving money at the state and county levels when drug courts reduce incarceration will pay off for taxpayers. But perhaps even more important is the saving of lives by investing in programs to turn drug abusers into wage-earning stable members of their communities.

Sincerely,

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