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Drug Treatment Alternative-to-Prison Program (DTAP)

The number of offenders in New York State prisons for drug offenses has increased dramatically, from 3,000 at the onset of the crack epidemic in 1986, to about 14,000 today. More than one fifth of all state prison inmates are drug offenders, many of whom committed non-violent crimes to support their drug habit. In October, 1990, Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes initiated the Drug Treatment Alternative-to-Prison Program (DTAP) on the premise that defendants would return to society in a better position to resist drugs and crime after treatment than if they had spent a comparable time in prison at nearly twice the cost.

DTAP is the first prosecution-run program in the country to divert prison-bound felony offenders to residential drug treatment. The program targets drug-addicted defendants arrested for nonviolent felony offenses who have previously been convicted of one or more nonviolent felonies. Qualified defendants enter a felony guilty plea and receive a deferred sentence that allows them to participate in a residential therapeutic community (TC) drug treatment program for a period of 15 to 24 months. Those who successfully complete the program have their charges dismissed; those who fail are brought back to court by a special warrant enforcement team and sentenced to prison. To prevent relapse and reduce recidivism, DTAP has a job developer to assist graduates in finding and maintaining employment.

As of May 1, 2008, 2588 defendants have been accepted into the program, 351 are still in treatment and 1085 have completed the program and have had their charges dismissed. Since 1998, when DTAP shifted from a deferred-prosecution to a deferred-sentencing model, the program has achieved an impressive one-year retention rate of 76%, which compares very favorably with retention data of other studies of residential drug treatment programs. Ninety-one percent of DTAP's graduates who are able to work are employed. Ninety percent of the participants who failed treatment have been returned to court for prosecution and sentencing in a median time of twenty-one days. DTAP is highly cost effective. Our analysis of the savings realized on correction, health care, public assistance and recidivism costs combined with the tax revenues generated by the DTAP graduates reveals that diversion to DTAP has resulted in economic benefits of \$43 million dollars per the 1085 graduates.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, which recently announced the findings of its federally-funded five-year evaluation of DTAP in a White Paper, *Crossing the Bridge: An Evaluation of the Drug Treatment Alternative-to-Prison (DTAP) Program*, has endorsed the program as "a promising example of what law enforcement can do to reduce the number of addicted drug offenders in America's prisons." CASA's study included the following dramatic findings: DTAP participants remain in treatment six times longer than those in the most recent national study of long-term residential treatment. The participants are 67% less likely to return to prison two years after leaving the program than are individuals of a matched comparison group two years after leaving prison. DTAP graduates had re-arrest rates that were 33% lower; re-conviction rates that were 45% lower; and were 87% less likely to return to prison than those of a matched comparison group. DTAP graduates are three and one-half times likelier to be employed than they were before their arrest. These results are achieved at half the cost of incarceration.

For information contact Anne J. Swern, First Assistant District Attorney, at (718) 250-3939.