

Washington DC Superior Court's Citywide Community Courts

Website: <http://www.dccourts.gov/internet/globalcontentlocator.jsf>

Program Start Date: 2012

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Information: Washington DC is the first city in the nation to restructure its criminal court system into a series of calendars following key “community court” principles of community engagement, community restitution, and linking offenders to social services.

Beginning in January 2012, the Washington, D.C. Superior Court Washington, D.C. was restructured to create six community-focused courts, each with a dedicated judge, to hear U.S. misdemeanor cases, and continued its existing calendar where a single judge hears municipal misdemeanors and traffic violations. In each case, the judges participate in monthly meetings in the neighborhoods to which they’ve been assigned, and use community court strategies such as community service in the district of arrest, linkages to social services and , when appropriate, ongoing judicial monitoring.

The restructuring occurred after a comprehensive planning process that began in 2011 and continued into 2012. Representatives of a broad cross-section of justice stakeholders were convened on a regular basis to discuss topics such as engaging individual communities across the city, assessing client needs, streamlining court processes, facilitating community service in neighborhoods affected by crime, linking offenders to services, and measuring results. As part of the project, Center for Court Innovation staff (with the support of the US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance) conducted a number of planning workshops, hosted site visits to New York demonstration projects, and provided ongoing technical assistance to project planners.

Criminal Justice Partners: Criminal court, prosecutors, pretrial services, probation, defense bar, law enforcement.

Evaluation/Research: The inspiration for taking the community court model to the citywide level was Washington’s East of the River Community Court (ERCC), which opened in 2002. The research firm Weststat performed an independent evaluation of the ERCC, and released a report in 2012. According to the report, compared with defendants with similar characteristics in Washington’s 5th police district, defendants in the ERCC program who went through a diversion program or a special treatment court had a 60% lower reoffending rate while their cases were pending. In the year after successfully completing a diversion program, those ERCC program defendants had a 42% lower reoffending rate. See <http://legaltimes.typepad.com/blt/2012/08/study-shows-dc-community-court-program-lowered-reoffending-rates.html>