



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: December 9, 2016  
TO: Specialty Court Grantees  
FROM: Camille Cain, Executive Director, Criminal Justice Division *CC*  
SUBJECT: Specialty court grant funding

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CJD will publish the FY 2018 Specialty Court Program Request for Applications on December 19, 2016. You will see some changes to the specialty court program. A key change is that CJD will no longer fund probation officer, prosecutor, or defense attorney salaries for specialty court programs funded for state fiscal year 2018. We know that this decision will affect a number of our funded projects and we wanted to share this information and underscore that the need for this decision is simply one of funding availability. Following are some considerations:

- **High level of funding.** CJD had about \$3.6 million in appropriations specifically for specialty courts in FY17. We received over \$17.2 million in requests and awarded \$12 million to 78 specialty courts. This level of funding is up 36% from \$8.8 million in 2013.
- **Decreasing revenues.** In large part, CJD uses the Criminal Justice Planning Fund to make up the difference between the \$3.6 million in appropriations and the \$12 million in actual specialty court funding. This fund is intended for a wide array of criminal justice, juvenile justice, victim services, and Crime Stoppers programs. The fund, made up of court costs and fees submitted by counties, is diminishing at over \$1 million each year.
- **Growth in demand.** In 2013, CJD received \$10.7 million in specialty court grant requests and \$17.2 million in FY 17—a 60% increase in requests for specialty courts.
- **Growth in funding but not in participants.** In an analysis of specialty court projects funded in 2011 and still funded in FY 15, grant budgets increased by 22% but during that same time period the number of participants only increased by 1% and successful completions increased by 4%.

As a result of these realities, CJD and the Specialty Courts Advisory Council met to discuss our very limited options and the principles we would use to make decisions. This discussion resulted in five main principles:

- **Treatment first.** We determined to preserve our commitment to direct services and treatment-related dollars above all else.
- **Support excellent programs.** It is important that the limited dollars that we have available go to the most effective programs. (CJD has revamped its performance measurement methodology for specialty courts and outcomes will become an increasingly significant factor in future funding decisions.)
- **Training and technical assistance is important.** Given the growth in specialty courts across the state, a concerted effort to provide training and technical assistance is needed to help ensure that the existing

courts meet best practice requirements and consistently operate with excellence. (CJD will announce an opportunity to provide this support later in December.)

- **Preserve as many courts as possible.** One option for addressing the limited dollars was simply to significantly lower the number of courts we fund. However, CJD and the Council opted to preserve at least partial funding for as many specialty courts as possible.
- **Support our existing courts before funding new ones.** We will temporarily halt the growth of new CJD-funded specialty courts; as a result, CJD will not consider any application from a specialty court that CJD did not fund in either FY 2016 or FY 2017. Additionally CJD will cap funding levels at the most recent year's expenditures minus any newly ineligible line items.

Given the principles above, CJD along with the Specialty Courts Advisory Council determined that we could no longer support county personnel costs not directly associated with treatment-related services.

CJD believes in doing everything we can to make Texas safer and to help change Texans lives for the better. Specialty courts play an integral role in helping high-risk, high-need offenders to succeed in their communities and avoid recidivism; for that we are grateful. CJD will continue to provide funding and guidance wherever possible and support specialty courts as a part of our portfolio of criminal justice initiatives.

CJD will publish the FY 2018 Specialty Court Program Request for Applications on December 19, 2016. If you have any questions or concerns regarding these changes, please contact Andrew Friedrichs, Associate Director of Justice Programs, at (512) 463-8232 or [andrew.friedrichs@gov.texas.gov](mailto:andrew.friedrichs@gov.texas.gov).