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Re: Judicial Masters

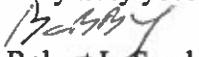
Chair Maxine Grad and Members, House Judiciary Committee:

I write to offer my strong support for the Judiciary's proposal to create the position of Judicial Master. Although the proposal envisions the Judicial Master as having multiple roles, the creation of the position will assist tremendously in the state-wide development of DUI and other Drug Treatment Courts. The presiding judicial officer in a treatment court must have the authority to impose sanctions and utilize incentives to motivate participants. As long as the judicial officer has that authority it is not critical that the position have all the other roles and responsibilities of a superior court judge. With minor amendments to the submitted language with regard to the taking of pleas and sentencing, the Judicial Master can have the authority necessary to preside successfully in a treatment court.

It is important to note that this Committee's expression of interest in expanding treatment courts served as a catalyst for the Judicial Master proposal. That suggests, then, that a continued expression of interest by the Legislature will help move the expansion of treatment courts from the idea stage to a reality. Expanding DUI and other Drug Treatment Courts is not only vital to "geographic justice" but it will promote public safety and ultimately save the state money.

Finally, while the creation of Judicial Masters is important, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Superior Court Judges who started treatment courts in Vermont found a way to integrate the treatment court cases into their normal busy dockets. We should not view the creation of Judicial Masters as the exclusive way that treatment courts can expand in Vermont. The Legislature should encourage Superior Court Judges with a passion for treatment courts (of which there are many), and the Judiciary as a whole, to continue with their efforts to expand the approach throughout the state.

Very truly yours,

  
Robert L. Sand