
RELAPSE PREVENTION COURT ANNUAL REPORT

March 2024 to March 2025

Relapse Prevention Court (RPC) is a voluntary program approved by the Board of Judges in March 2018 as an initiative to assist individuals with significant drug use histories and risk of relapse upon their release from federal custody.¹ The ongoing oversight by a probation officer who specializes in the field of drug treatment, as well as regular contact with a judicial officer, is intended to provide optimal services and resources for participants in recovery.

From the release of our last report in March 2024, through March 2025, the program has continued with its interdisciplinary team, and participants in various phases and stages of recovery, gathering every other week on alternate Wednesdays.² In 2024 and through the first quarter of 2025, there were twelve active participants. Three individuals graduated from the program and were honored in two graduation ceremonies, held in November 2024, and in April 2025.

This year RPC expanded the participant pool to include individuals at a higher risk of relapse, tailored services to meet each participant's needs, expanded services available to participants, and developed staff through national training.

RECOVERY SUPPORT THROUGH TESTING AND TREATMENT

In that the focus of our program is relapse prevention and abstinence from drug use, participants are obligated to submit to random drug testing. Among the twelve participants actively engaged in the program during this period, we administered 109 drug tests. We also screened for alcohol use, which is prohibited in certain cases via special condition based on the participant's history of alcohol use. We administered thirty-three breathalyzer tests, all of those tests were negative. Ninety-one of the 109 urine samples collected in 2024, and the first quarter of 2025 were negative for the use of controlled and prohibited substances. It is important to note that the increase in positive urine test is a result of the program's efforts to expand the participant pool to include individuals that have shorter periods of sobriety or are in active addiction.

¹ A comprehensive description of RPC, which details the genesis, organization, and administration of the program, is on the Eastern District of Pennsylvania website: <https://www.paed.uscourts.gov/relapse-prevention-court>.

² For the year 2024, the team members include the Honorable Jeffrey Schmehl, the Honorable Craig Straw, Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mary Theresa Soltis and Joseph LaBar, U.S. Probation Officer/Drug Treatment Specialist Katie Quinlan, Supervisory Probation Officer Valerie Riedel, Assistant Federal Defenders Natasha Taylor-Smith, Anna Kessler, and Mara Meehan, Department of Justice (DOJ) Reentry Coordinator Mia Lamb, Law Clerk Jenise Rivera, and Deputy Clerk Donna Croce. We also acknowledge the support and helpful interest from Chief Probation Officers Jana Law and Manuel A. Jimenez and Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Theodore McKee.

Additionally, the number of positive tests does not reflect the total level of use. At times testing is paused when an individual admits to using. In the 2024-2025 year, five participants admitted to using. The team responded with court guidance, placement with behavioral health services, and various support services to help alleviate daily living hurdles. Ultimately one participant entered extended in-patient treatment, one participant withdrew from the program and entered in-patient treatment, one participant transitioned to a higher level of care with an outpatient treatment provider and continues in the program, one participant withdrew from the program due to external legal factors, and one participant was placed with an outpatient treatment provider and completed the program without further relapse.

Treatment remains a primary focus for participants. Counseling services are delivered to participants through a variety of providers in the community. Providers include: The Northeast Treatment Center (NET), Rehab After Work, PATH, The Wedge, VA, JFK Behavioral Health, Courage Medicine, Bowling Green Behavioral Health, and the Council for Relationships. Treatment is delivered in accordance with clinical standards, by licensed clinical providers, and at no cost to participants. Access to care and coverage is normally available through Medicaid. However, if an individual does not have Medicaid or other health insurance benefits, the U.S. Probation Office covers the cost of services at approved vendors. Treatment modalities for participants include cognitive behavioral therapy, psychiatric care and, if indicated, medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD). Participants received counseling on an outpatient basis which includes individual or group formats based upon the recommendation of clinical providers. Participants have reported positive results from attending counseling, not only in maintaining sobriety but also in their lives and relationships. For instance, one participant sought couples counseling with his wife to improve their relationship and adjust to life after being released.

Throughout the year, we have encouraged the use of peer support through attendance of AA and NA meetings as well as sponsorship. Two participants noted significant support provided through group meetings and their sponsor relationships. Three participants were referred to ProAct Support Services for peer support. Most participants included peer support/contacting their sponsor in their five step trigger response plans. Notably, all participants included people, places, and things in their recovery plans, which is a strategy used in outpatient therapy, groups, and AA and NA meetings. This strategy is used by participants to avoid and handle triggers associated with people, places, and things to maintain their sobriety.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

RPC has been fortunate to share the resources and community partners that were established through the Supervision to Aid Reentry (STAR) Court. All participants received public benefit screenings upon intake with the DOJ Reentry Coordinator on the team. Additionally, emergency assistance funds are available to participants through the Luongo Fund.³ All participants are screened for benefits eligibility. Two participants received emergency assistance funds through the Luongo Fund. One participant independently found an auto loan assistance program for re-entry individuals, adding to the program's community partners. Four participants received clothing donations from our community partner, Our Closet. Two participants were referred to Temple University's Small Business Development Center for assistance with small business planning. Two participants were referred to UPenn Prep's Restorative Entrepreneurship Program for assistance with small business planning. One participant received assistance resolving state court cost and fines. Three participants received resume assistance from law clerk volunteers. Four participants received legal aid to resolve traffic violations and outstanding debts. Numerous other referrals were made to various partners by our Re-Entry Coordinators to assist with employment, college enrollment, family support, financial literacy, and housing. More referrals and resources were deployed as follows:



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

*Conducted in partnership with the
Temple University Fox School of Business*

- Credit report assistance
- Money management, building savings

*Conducted in Partnership with the Consumer
Bankruptcy Assistance Project*

- Understanding tax forms
- Completing 2022 tax returns



BENEFITS SCREENING, RESUME ASSISTANCE & RE-ENTRY NEEDS

- Re-Entry Law Clerk Volunteers assisted with resume review and applications for medical/food benefits.
- Individuals also received help with birth certificates, social security cards, photo IDs, and voter registration.
- One on one digital literacy support, i.e., smart phones, email, online job applications, general computer skills.

³ District Court Judge Gerald A. McHugh established a fund (also a 501(c)(3)) initially dedicated to supporting the STAR re-entry programs. In 2018, the fund was extended to help support RPC and our district's STRIDES mental health court. The fund is dedicated to Judge McHugh's mentor, former Chief Judge Alfred L. Luongo. The fund is administered by the Philadelphia Bar Foundation. Money is used to assist participants with emergency expenses, such as housing deposits, education, and other costs that cannot be paid with Second Chance Act funds.



LEGAL ASSISTANCE

*Conducted with the assistance of
Volunteer Law Clerks*

- Resolving state court cost and fines
- Assistance with zoning variances
- Lemon law assistance
- Resolving traffic court matters

Temple University Family Law Clinic

- Child support assistance



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

*Conducted in partnership with
Community College of Philadelphia*

- *I Am More* Reentry program at Community College of Philadelphia offered scholarships and free resources.
- Participants utilized the Goodwill Job Training Program to obtain relevant certificates.

RPC PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

From March 2024 to March 2025, team members attended various training programs. The training programs included: The U.S. Department of Justice's Addressing Substance Use Disorders Through Person Centered Care, Reconnect Inc.'s "That's Not Fair!" What They Hear: Perceptions of Fairness in Treatment Court, and All Rise's Roles and Responsibilities Program. The team remains committed to learning how to better connect with and understand participants while maintaining an effective scientifically backed approach to care.

RPC is now in its seventh year. Since its approval to be a pilot program in 2018, the program has committed itself to providing compassionate, evidence-based services for individuals in initial re-entry recovering from substance use disorders. In 2023, we began internal dialog regarding possible expansion of the participant pool. All participants have maintained a lengthy period of sobriety by the time they enter the program, whether it is due to incarceration or participation in programming (mostly in-patient). In 2024, the participant pool was expanded to include the targeted participant group discussed in 2023. Some new participants included individuals with less than one month of sobriety and some in active addiction. While the program did see an increase in positive tests and sanctions, the program was able to provide multiple forms of support through services, community, and resources which led to the graduation of two individuals who experienced relapse while in the program, placement of an individual in need of in-patient services, and two out of three individuals staying committed to the program and themselves. RPC is committed to assisting individuals prevent relapse and does not expect participants to complete the program relapse free, although many do. The expansion to include higher risk individuals was not only the goal of RPC in 2023 but is the purpose of the RPC program. RPC aims to help individuals through their addiction during a time in life that can be particularly challenging and stressful. RPC believes that the resources, support, and community RPC provides its participants will continue to be beneficial to and assist individuals at a higher risk for relapse. The RPC team has continued its training to better assist the participants, has

tailored resources and services to serve the participants' specific needs, has worked closely with treatment providers to provide the level of care participants need, and has expanded the resources available to participants to meet their daily needs. RPC remains committed to assisting individuals avoid relapse and building a strong supportive community.

cc: All EDPA District Court Judges
All EDPA Magistrate Judges
Manuel Jimenez, Chief, U.S Probation
Jonathan Henshaw, Senior Deputy Chief, U.S. Probation
David Metcalf, U.S. Attorney
Lisa Evans Lewis, Chief, Federal Defender Association
Eric Gartner, U.S. Marshal
George Wylesol, Clerk of Court
Kimberly A. Kaleta, Chief, U.S. Pretrial

