MEMORANDUM

RE: Technical Assistance Visit by Judge Jamey Weitzman to the Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas AD HOC Drug Court Committee to Assist in the Planning of a Drug Court Program: Technical Assistance Assignment No. 037

FROM: OJP Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project

DATE: July 22, 1997

In April 1997, Judge Walter R. Little, of the Criminal Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, requested technical assistance from OJP’s Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project (DCCTAP) at American University to assist the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas’ AD HOC Drug Court Committee in planning for a drug court. Among the issues the Court asked the DCCTAP to address were the following:

- the level of resources needed to develop an effective drug court program;
- whether it is necessary to have one judge assigned full time to the program and the caseload that one judge could handle;
- the level of time and resources required for screening and supervision of drug court cases;
- guidance in how participant noncompliance with drug court requirements, including relapse, should be addressed;
- how jail resources can be most effectively used to support the drug court program
- the most appropriate role for probation officers in a drug court program in terms of the supervision and case management required

The DCCTAP assigned Judge Jamey Weitzman, who had initiated the development of both an adult and juvenile drug court in Baltimore City, to meet with the Committee in response to Judge Little’s request.
On May 28, 1997, Judge Weitzman met with members of the Committee to discuss issues relevant to the design of the drug court in Allegheny County. The meeting was attended by representatives from the District Attorney's Office, Senator Arlen Specter's office, the private bar, St. Francis Medical Center, Probation Office, Police Department and judiciary.

In addition to court officials, Thomas Green, Chief Probation Office, and Earl Hill, Program Manager of Forensic Services at St. Francis Medical Center, have been instrumental in developing interest in a drug court in Pittsburgh. Additionally, the D.A.'s Office has also been a powerful force in the Pennsylvania Criminal justice system and assistant D.A. Clair Capristo, is also taking a leading role in shaping the Drug Court.

During the session, the issues raised in the technical assistance request as well as key components necessary for a successful Drug Court were discussed. Judge Weitzman provided perspective on both the operations of the drug courts in Baltimore (adult drug courts have been implemented in both the District and Circuit Courts in Baltimore, and juvenile delinquency and dependency drug courts are currently being planned). During the course of these discussions, the issues of concern, outlined above by the Committee, were also addressed. Judge Weitzman explained the organization of most drug courts, which, depending upon the volume of cases being handled, has generally entailed the assignment of a drug court judge part-time for the drug court docket, with the balance of time devoted to other judicial duties. She also provided perspective on how drug court programs respond to relapse - generally through ordering more intensive treatment, short-term incarceration, and/or other conditions to promote recovery.

Based on these discussions, the following topics emerged that will require further attention by the Committee:

1. **Support Services:** Currently, the court relies on St. Francis Hospital and several other treatment facilities to provide additional support services. However, the Committee has not considered how other support services will be integrated under the drug court umbrella. The discussion focused on accessing and expanding the range of ancillary services necessary for the drug court program. The Committee needs to consider, however, how these support services will be coordinated under the overall direction of the drug court program.

2. **Supervising Treatment Providers:** The drug court will utilize the services of numerous private treatment providers. The discussion focused on integrating treatment services into the drug court program and the necessary oversight that will be required.

3. **Ascertaining Available Resources:** The Committee plans to fund the drug court with existing resources and in-kind contributions. Local officials in this jurisdiction are fortunate in that they have access to a good network of treatment providers. St. Francis Hospital has taken the lead in the drug court effort and has agreed to provide a large number of scholarship beds. The Committee also believes that they can obtain additional treatment slots from other providers. There was discussion regarding the extent of their existing resources and the advantages of proceeding without external funding. OJP and other funding sources were also discussed.

4. **Expediting the Time for Program Entry:** The primary weakness in the proposed
drug court program is the delay between arrest and entrance into the program. Currently, the Pennsylvania Court system involves numerous independent townships. Currently, there is no centralized location or mechanisms for identifying and reviewing potentially eligible drug court cases until approximately 45 days after arrest at the time of the arraignment.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the possibility of altering the current system. Senator’s Specter’s representative advised of the Senator’s interest in decreasing pretrial delay for defendants on bail. Changes in existing procedures and legislation may be necessary and Senator Specter’s office may be willing to assist in this investigation. The discussion also focussed on alternatives to this lengthy delay with a view towards shaving even several days or weeks off the time between arrest and potential program entry. The Committee is cognizant of this unwieldy timeframe and, although immediate substantial changes appear unlikely, additional technical assistance is available to assist the Committee in addressing this issue. Achieving a very short timeframe between arrest and drug court program entry will be extremely important in promoting the impact of the treatment and other services provided and is an issue which most jurisdictions have had to address during the planning process.

It is anticipated that the Committee will make a follow-up visit to Baltimore to observe the drug court program in that jurisdiction as well as further discuss with Judge Weitzman the planning for Pittsburgh’s drug court program.

The members of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas AD HOC Drug Court Committee have given a great deal of thought regarding the drug court and are very thoughtfully and thoroughly addressing the variety of issues relevant to its planning and implementation. They appear to be well on their way to developing a viable program. Additional technical assistance is available, if needed, to assist them in further planning.