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**Opening Remarks**

**WATCP Annual Conference**

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**La Crosse, WI**

Good morning. I’m sorry that I cannot be with you in person today. And I want to thank La Crosse County Circuit Court Judge Elliot Levine for agreeing to read these brief welcoming remarks.

Welcome to La Crosse and this tenth annual meeting of the Wisconsin Association of Treatment Court Professionals.

Wisconsin has come a long way in the past ten years. A decade ago, we had about a dozen problem-solving court programs in Wisconsin. Today we have about 60 problem-solving court programs in 38 of the 72 counties, with more to come. Two simple facts explain this rapid expansion: One, these treatment court programs work. Two, treatment court programs are collaborative. Together we accomplish more than each of us working alone in our own silos. The treatment court programs are a collaborative multidisciplinary effort of the stakeholders in the criminal justice system, including judges, court staff, prosecutors, defense counsel, law enforcement, county boards, treatment providers, probation and community corrections officers, social service caseworkers, and the public.

The goal of treatment courts is, as you know, not only to improve public safety and reduce recidivism, but also to address the underlying issues that may contribute to an individual’s criminal behavior. Treatment courts deploy interventions that treat offenders while also holding them accountable for criminal actions.

I am proud that the court system has been an integral part of the problem-solving programs from the beginning and continues to work on improving and expanding these programs. The court system’s Planning and Policy Advisory Committee, popularly known as PPAC, has identified treatment courts as a major point of focus for the coming biennium. Through its Effective Justice Strategies Subcommittee, PPAC plans to conduct an evaluation of Wisconsin’s problem-solving court programs, to continue to provide training on best practices standards, to encourage expansion of treatment court programs, and to implement evidence-based decision making and practices.

The court system also supports treatment court initiatives through our participation as a partner in the legislative Treatment Alternatives and Diversion Program, known as TAD. We also participate as a member of the Statewide Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and its subcommittees. We have obtained grant funding for the Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator position and are working with the National Center for State Courts to develop performance measures for adult drug and hybrid courts. We are collaborating with the Wisconsin Association of Treatment Court Professionals to develop treatment court standards.

About a year ago, Governor Scott Walker and the Wisconsin legislature proclaimed May 2013 to be Drug Court Month. In doing so, the governor and legislature recognized the efficacy of drug court programs in preventing recidivism, reducing costs to taxpayers, restoring families, and making communities safer.

The legislature has also recently shown its support by increasing Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) funding by $1.5 million. The Department of Justice may now award grants to twelve counties and one Native American tribe to start new treatment court programs or to support continuing TAD programs. In announcing the grant awards, Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen noted, “These programs have a proven track record of reducing recidivism, making good use of public dollars and meeting the needs of offenders while ensuring accountability.” We are excited to have new opportunities to expand the benefits of problem-solving courts to Wisconsin communities, the criminal justice system, and the people of the state.

According to DOJ, the TAD program has saved $1.93 for every dollar invested in the program.

We have come a long way in the past decade because of your commitment and hard work. I join with you in celebrating the efforts of all the collaborating partners to improve the effectiveness of our courts for individuals, counties, and the state.

Let’s keep up the good work. And my best wishes for a successful conference.