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Top reasons to expand adult civil citation program

Albert M. Kopak, My View Published 2:55 p.m. ET June 17, 2016



You may or may not be aware that Leon County currently boasts a first-in-the-nation pre-arrest diversion program for adults facing arrest for a misdemeanor offense. This may not sound like a big deal, but it is. In fact, it's revolutionary.

There are many reasons why this program demands widespread support for further expansion across the state, but here are the top three.

Number 1: Eligible adults who complete the program no longer receive a life-altering arrest record. Believe it or not, an arrest record for something as minor as petit theft (one of the misdemeanor offenses eligible for pre-arrest diversion in the program) has a long-term impact on a person's life.

In fact, research has shown that it takes an average of 10 years for someone with an arrest to reach "redemption" and finally achieve a similar level of economic prosperity as someone without an arrest. Sadly, some never reach this state of recovery.

The average age of the typical participant in the pre-arrest adult civil citation program is 24. Without the opportunity to take part in the pre-arrest diversion program, this group of adults would have reached their early 30s before they returned to the same level of financial achievement as their peers.

Number 2: The adult civil citation pre-arrest diversion program is not soft on crime. It is quite the opposite. Rather than simply appear in court and pay a fine (which is how the traditional citation-in-lieu of arrest operates), this pre-arrest diversion program requires participation in an intervention program. Participants have 90 days to complete the conditions of the program, including a behavioral assessment, community service, drug screening and financial penalties. Accountability is significantly greater for adults in the program compared to those who are issued a notice-to-appear, pay the associated court fine and go on their way.

Number 3: The adult civil citation pre-arrest diversion program has achieved a significant level of success. Since its inception in March 2013, eight out of 10 adults who participated successfully completed the terms of the program. More importantly, the vast majority of successful participants avoid future contact with the criminal justice system. In concrete terms, 94 percent of successful participants were not re-arrested in the state of Florida in the one year following successful completion of the intervention program.

Supporting the broader expansion of the Leon County adult civil citation pre-arrest diversion program will hold more adults accountable in ways that current arrest-as-usual practices fail, provide intervention services where none are currently provided, and promote economic efficiency within the state. The best part may be that all this comes at no cost for government. Now you know why the program is revolutionary.

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