

EXHIBIT 4
DATE 1/15/07
HB 78

RIMROCK
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Mona L. Sumner, MHA ACATA
Chief Operations Officer

Rimrock Foundation is in strong support of House Bill 78.

It is time for a Paradigm Shift in our state - away from incarceration of low level non violent drug addicted offenders to effective, well researched diversion models. Drug Courts are one such model and Montana needs to grow its drug courts. The bill before you today is intended to provide substainability to drug courts currently in existence in our state. Every drug court was initiated with federal funds from the Bureau of Justice and this seed money has been good for Montana because it allowed us to initiate these diversion programs. Now it is time to fund them permanently and to develop more criminal drug courts to stem the ever burdgeoning flow of drug offenders into our over crowded jails and prison.

Currently, our Yellowstone County jail operates at more than double its capacity - a situation that is common in our more populated communities and by far the majority of those incarcerated are there directly due to their addition. In contrast, our criminal drug courts are effective at reducing incarceration of these offenders and treating their addiction in long-term structured settings that reflect partnerships between the Judicial, Probation and treatment systems. Recidivism rates which run around 70% in the corrections system, are 25% and lower when offenders are served by a drug court. These courts afford the most promise for reduction of crowded court calendars and over populated jails and prison if we will invest in them now.

Eighty drug addicted offenders are currently treated in the Billings Adult Misdemeanor Drug Court and each of these individuals has a sentence of jail time exceeding six months. By putting them into the drug court where they are drug screened, supervised by community probation, and treated by professionals for their addiction, we are saving dollars and preventing future incarcerations. Offenders are in our drug court for as long as it takes to help them address their problems which often include co-occurring psychiatric disorders. We need more resources to sustain and expand this court and to establish more criminal courts such as felony courts. Money spent on these community-based diversion programs now will ultimately reduce the demand for ever increasing amounts of money for Corrections. It's the best investment you can give to Montana's taxpayers!