

POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

2025

# Cherokee County Juvenile Court



## **PATH PROGRAM**

Promoting Accountability Through Healing  
Creating a PATH to a Brighter Future

Cherokee County  
— GEORGIA —

Policy and Procedure Manual: Cherokee County PATH Program  
Revised November 2025

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## **Overview of the PATH Program (formerly Juvenile Drug Treatment Court)**

P.A.T.H stands for Promoting Accountability Through Healing. The PATH program is an intervention continuum for juveniles who are under supervision through probation and who are screened at an elevated risk of substance abuse or substance abuse related activities. It is a collaborative effort between the Juvenile Court staff, District Attorney's Office, Defense Counsel, Department of Juvenile Justice, Treatment Providers, Law Enforcement, Department of Family and Children Services, and Cherokee County Board of Education school personnel. By working together, they seek to provide a variety of programs and consistent supervision geared toward supporting and helping youth to maintain a substance-free life.

The court program operates on principals that:

- Substance abuse is a long-term damaging process that must be repaired with long-term treatment.
- Substance abuse is usually the external indicator of other serious problems that an individual faces, thus the underlying causes of substance abuse must be addressed and treated also in order to maximize recovery.
- Relapse and sporadic progress are to be expected in treatment, thus progressive sanctions and rewards must be an integral part of the drug intervention program.
- The network of communication among team members must be working at its maximum to ensure that the Judge recognizes the proper sanctions and affirmations at the appropriate time.

The PATH program is a court that has been specifically designed and staffed to supervise non-violent drug dependent youth. These youth have been referred to a comprehensive and judicially monitored program that consists of intensive supervision, substance use treatment, and rehabilitation. The program is intended for those who are addicted to and are abusing substances and/or alcohol, or those that are at an elevated risk to do so and want to change their behavior. Treatment intervention is structured around authority and a judge. This system helps build a rapport between the criminal justice system and the treatment community.

While the PATH Program is promoting a positive interaction between the criminal justice system, community treatment agencies, and the juvenile, it also reaches several goals:

- Reduces participant contact with the criminal justice system;
- Reduces costs associated with criminal case processing and recidivism;
- Reduces incarceration at Regional Youth Detention Centers;
- Introduces participants to an ongoing process of recovery designed to achieve total abstinence from illegal drugs and/or alcohol abuse;
- Promote self-sufficiency and empower those with substance use issues to become productive and responsible members of the community;
- Promote public safety;
- Early age interventions; and
- Raise community awareness.

The program is a substance abuse treatment/rehabilitation program that includes:

- Frequent, random drug testing;
- Judicial supervision;
- Counseling; individual, group, and family
- Educational/vocational training;
- Life skills training;
- Social skills training; and
- Use of court imposed sanctions and incentives
- Mental Health Support
- Transportation assistance
- Access to Mentors

### **Mission Statement**

The Mission of the Cherokee County PATH Program is to utilize judicial and community-based interventions to provide an effective response to youthful offenders and their families. These services will create safer communities by strengthening families, reducing crime, and developing productive citizens.

### **STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION**

The PATH Program provides equal opportunities for all eligible cases and does not discriminate in admitting to the program or in treatment based on race, ethnicity, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, marital or parental status, religion, creed, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or political beliefs.

### **Juvenile Treatment Court Standards**

1. Juvenile treatment courts serve justice-involved youth suffering from severe and persistent mental illnesses, or substance use disorders by integrating evidence-based behavioral and mental health and substance use disorder services with justice system case processing.
2. Using a non-adversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel, promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights
3. Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed into the program
4. Juvenile treatment courts provide access to a continuum of mental health, alcohol, drug, and other related treatment and rehabilitation services.
5. Juvenile treatment courts shall develop and implement a drug testing policy that is applied consistently and fairly.
6. A coordinated strategy governs program responses to participants' compliance.
7. Ongoing judicial interaction with each program participant is essential.
8. Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness.
9. Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective juvenile treatment court planning, implementation, and operations.
10. Forging partnerships among juvenile treatment courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances program effectiveness.

## **Confidentiality**

All members of the PATH Program Team must hold information discussed during pretrial interviews, assessment, team meetings, and treatment sessions in confidence. The court sessions are closed to the public.

In order to establish ground for termination from the PATH Program, no test results or statements made by the participants in any other prosecution other than in the treatment court proceedings may be used. However, evidence discovered either routinely in the course of a criminal investigation or discovered during pretrial interviews, assessment, treatment, or drug treatment court proceedings shall not be inadmissible.

Under federal law, information regarding substance abuse treatment is protected by the provision of 42 U.S. Code § 290dd-2 and the regulations implementing these laws are 42 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2. Federal Confidentiality Regulation prohibits the release of information about participants in substance abuse treatment without a written consent from the individual. Release of information without consent is waived when any of the PATH Team members feel that any of the following apply:

- Participant commits or threatens to commit a crime, either at the program or against any staff person or participant of the program;
- Participant is threatening homicide; or
- Participant is in danger of committing suicide.

All participants entering the PATH Program are required to complete a Release of Information. This form allows program staff to obtain from or release records to all authorized agencies. This authorization and consent are subject to revocation at any time, except to the extent that the treatment intervention program has already taken action in reliance on it. If not previously revoked, this authorization will remain in effect until final disposition of this case, but not to exceed five years from the date signed.

The treatment provider maintains separate clinical participant files and follows all of the above rules/laws pertaining to confidentiality.

The participant has the opportunity to consult with an attorney before signing any contracts or consents. The program coordinator will review all contracts and consents with the participant to identify if the participant is illiterate and/or has the ability to read and comprehend the language in which it was printed.

### **Participant Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria**

- 14 – 17 years of age (younger if approved by team)
- Must reside in Cherokee County.
- Must be willing to participate in the PATH program.
- Acknowledges substance related treatment is needed
- No violent charges.
- No sex offense charges without prior treatment.
- No gang affiliation.
- Comply with VOCA if applicable.
- Be assessed by clinical team to see readiness to change.
- Have parent/guardian/familial support
- Moderate to high-risk on evidence based approved assessment
- Team will determine appropriateness based on review of delinquency history, legal issues, and clinical appropriateness

### **PATH Treatment Court Team**

#### **Judge**

Judges are a vital part of the accountability court team, and their role is greatest to the success of the court. Judges will conduct regular reviews detailing each participant's compliance with the treatment mandate, drug test results, cooperation with the treatment provider, and progress towards abstinence and law-abiding behavior. The Judge will oversee the court progress through staffings, administer sanctions and incentives as they see fit, and preside over the court hearings. Most importantly, the Judge will make all final decisions based on the participant and their needs, including sanctions. Through court sessions, the interactions between the Judge and participant build a strong rapport. The Judge will speak directly to them, asking about their progress, applauding their accomplishments, encouraging them to try harder, all in all while reminding them of their obligation to remain drug-free.

#### **Coordinator**

The role of the coordinator is to jointly serve as the public face of the accountability court. They will assist the Judge in planning, coordinating, and carrying out judicial administrative matters for the accountability court. They manage and oversee the overall program in many areas; i.e. data collection and submission, preparing and maintaining all paperwork (documents, manuals, and handbooks), fundraising and grant application, public outreach, education, training, and continuing education for court team, facilitating court staffings and supervising treatment services and surveillance officers.

#### **Treatment Provider**

Treatment provider may come in the role of many: counselor, psychologist, therapist, clinicians, or substance abuse treatment professional. Primary goals of the treatment team are to eliminate the individual dependency on drugs, treat the cravings through stabilization, and focus on

helping obtain education or job training and remaining free of substances. They provide outpatient services to participants based on their current needs, implement treatment curriculum, and maintain records on each session and administer services pursuant to each participant's case plan. They are responsible for entering treatment notes into case management system in a timely manner to allow for data reporting and so the PATH team will also stay up to date on treatment progress or any concerns that need addressing.

### **District Attorney/Prosecutor**

An accountability court prosecutor helps to identify and select offenders who should participate in the program. They attend staffings and court sessions working with the rest of the team promoting public safety and protecting the participant's rights. They also share a common goal with the rest of the accountability court team in that the program has a successful treatment completion from the individual.

### **Delinquency Program Manager**

The delinquency program manager will work with the District Attorney's office in identifying youth that would be best suited to participate in the program. They will have an active role in referral decisions and attend staffings and court hearings where appropriate.

### **Defense Counsel**

The defense attorney advocates for the participant during staffing and court proceedings. They assist the participant with explanation of legal documents and contractual obligations. They will educate the participant about the purposes of the program, the consequences of the noncompliance with the rules, and benefits to completing the program. While making the participant's constitutional rights a primary concern, they also focus on the participant's legal rights.

### **Department of Juvenile Justice**

The probation officer performs work for the accountability court program by overseeing the individuals through compliance while on their probation sentence. They have an active role in referral decisions, monitor home and school compliance, and administer random and scheduled drug tests. They will attend staffings and court sessions.

### **Law Enforcement/Compliance Officer**

The law enforcement acts as a liaison between the accountability court program and their law enforcement community. They work together with the probation officer in supervising surveillance through home and curfew checks and alcohol/drug testing. They may assist with any background investigations of potential participants and attending staffings and court sessions. Compliance/Field visits should be conducted at a minimum of once per month and can be requested by a member of the PATH team during the interim if necessary.

### **Department of Family and Children Services**

The representative from DFCS helps to provide necessary family supports in the community to help ensure success in the accountability court program. They act to provide services to set the

youth up for long-term success in the appropriate environment. They will attend staffings and court sessions.

### **Cherokee County Board of Education**

The school representative works with the youth in the program to ensure that their educational needs are being met. This might mean helping them get back into school and obtaining a diploma or helping them to receive the necessary tutoring to obtain a GED. They will attend staffings and court and provide the team with updates in regard to school attendance, behavior, grades, and needs.

### **ORIENTATION AND TRAINING FOR PATH TEAM MEMBERS**

*New PATH Team Members* will receive a copy of the Policies and Procedures Manual and the Participant Handbook, as well as the link to the Juvenile Treatment Court Best Practice Standards from the coordinator prior to their first staffing and court session. The Coordinator will schedule an appointment to complete the new team member orientation and answer questions prior to the first session. New Team Members are also given links to CACJ and AllRise for training opportunities specific to their role.

*Core Team Members* will complete annual training, Children and continuing education as required by the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia (CACJ). This includes attending the CACJ's Annual Conference as outlined by CACJ. Attendance may rotate each year, depending on the funding available. All Core Team Members shall attend tune-up and refresher training every three to five years. Core Team Members will also participate in ongoing professional training specific to their disciplines and maintain necessary licenses and certifications.

Training information is also disbursed out to **ALL** team members by the coordinator on an ongoing basis for any additional learning opportunities or areas of interest.

### **Program Operation**

#### **Intake and Referral**

Participants may be referred to the PATH by various people: law enforcement, district attorney, or probation officer. Once a referral form is submitted, the District Attorney's Office will review the participant's case to determine if they are an appropriate candidate for drug court. If they are, they would then meet with the accountability court coordinator (along with their defense attorney) and would go over what the program offers. If the participant wishes to apply, they will then submit an application/intake form. The coordinator then schedules a risk/needs assessment to determine if the participant is eligible for the program. The results are submitted to the team during staffing and a collective decision, with the Judge, will determine if the participant is accepted. Treatment services should start within 30 days of a participant being determined eligible for the program.

### **Participant Requirements**

At entry, the participant must sign a contract. This contract details all requirements and rules of the PATH Program. The contract also waives participant's rights of confidentiality related to treatment and right to a preliminary hearing. The defense attorney will review all forms, documents, and contracts with the participant before meeting with the Judge. The participant will then appear before the PATH Judge for sentencing, and the Judge will inform them of the rights and program expectations.

The participant will be responsible, once in the program, to follow through on the following:

- Be willing to commit to sobriety.
- Participate fully in each phase of the PATH Program.
- Abide by all rules of the PATH Program
- Actively participate in all required groups and treatment related activities.
- Accept responsibility for self and actions by being honest and open in treatment.
- Attend court as each phase requires.
- Submit to random drug screenings as required.
- Stay up to date on participant fees.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection will be used in the form of telephone interviews, surveys, review of complaints, random urine tests, and coordination with probation, etc. The program coordinator will compose all the information and bring any new information up to the rest of the team during staffing. Data collected will also be sent to CACJ per quarterly reporting requirements. Review of any data collected will be used to make program improvements such as changes in policy and/or procedure, or to support any requests for needed funding to support the program.

### **Sanctions/Incentives**

Sanctions are the result of the participant failing to comply with the requirements of the program. They assist the participant in recognizing behaviors that may result in dismissal from the program. Sanctions are discussed with the accountability court team and are imposed based on the behavior of the individual. Sanctions are determined by the Judge after receiving input from the team. If the participant is consistently noncompliant with the program rules and procedures, the sanctions could become more severe (i.e. incarceration or termination from the program). Detention will only be considered as a sanction to be a last option in the most serious cases of non-compliance. Detention should not exceed 5 days, and if possible, the participant will still receive treatment while detained. No detention sanction will exceed the maximum period authorized by law.

Incentives reward participants for taking positive steps to attaining and maintaining a lifestyle free of substance use and crime. Participants could also be rewarded for personal or educational achievements, obtaining employment, or showing respect. Both sanctions and incentives should be personalized to the participant and when possible, implemented as soon as possible, rather than waiting until the next PATH session or court date with the approval of the Judge.

### **Participant Fees**

Each participant is responsible for a fee associated with the accountability court. Initial program fee is \$150 and \$30 per month of effective the date that the contract is signed. Therefore, unless indicated otherwise in an order signed by the Judge, the first month will cost the participant a total of \$180 to include both the initial program fee and the first month of participation. All program fees must be paid in full for the participant to both advance to a higher phase and to be eligible for graduation.

### **Drug Screening**

The PATH Program uses the Cherokee County Drug Lab for random screening. All participants are required to submit to random and observed drug screens. Throughout the program, each participant will screen a minimum of twice per week. All testing will be provided by a trained individual of the same sex and will be directly observed per current lab protocol approved by Cherokee County. Results will be given to the program coordinator for data collection. Any participant who wants to challenge a positive drug screen may do so at their own expense. However, if the external laboratory concludes that the initial screen was a “false positive” the participant will be reimbursed. Creatinine violations and drug screens scheduled and missed without a valid excuse (determined by the Judge) will be considered positive drug screens. If a single sample yields a positive result for more than one prohibited substance, the results will be considered as a single positive drug test.

### **Treatment**

Treatment plans shall match participant needs with an appropriate level of treatment and supervision and shall start The ideal length of a juvenile drug treatment court program is 12 -18 months, which can be inclusive of aftercare. Treatment plans will be implemented in all five phases. Each phase will have specified treatment objectives, therapeutic, and rehabilitative activities and requirements for advancement and graduation. They will include standardized, evidence-based practices, drug testing, and counseling. Advancement from each phase will be determined by the accountability court team on the condition that the participant has satisfied the established criteria for advancement. Each phase will vary for each participant depending on their treatment progress, drug test results, and individual progress. Termination from the program will be determined by the Judge after discussion with the accountability court team based on the participant’s performance.

### **Phases**

#### Phase 1: Stabilization and Orientation

Eligible to advance to Phase 2 in approximately 30 days

Participant will pay a program fee of \$150

Eligible to advance to Phase 2 in approximately 30 days

- Participant and Parent/Guardian complete Orientation with Coordinator.
- Enroll in school full time (Polaris, Mountain Education Charter High School, or GED enrollment must be approved by the Judge). Grades must be submitted to coordinator weekly when school is in session

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- Parents must apply for medical insurance for you if you do not already have insurance and proof of insurance must be provided to the Court Coordinator.
- Write autobiography and submit to Coordinator
- Complete a Safety Plan.
- Attend weekly Case Management.
- Attend all scheduled Court reviews.
- Attend all scheduled counseling sessions (individual, group, or family), per individual treatment plan (minimum of **four** sessions).
- Attend group treatment as directed (minimum **four** groups)
- Meet with Probation Officer as directed.
- Submit to all drug screens requested by Probation Officer, Compliance Officer, or as directed by Coordinator.
- Be at home by curfew (7:00 PM).
- Pay \$30/month fees to the Juvenile Clerk's Office.
- Complete 2 hours of community service at an approved location.
- No positive screens for 14 c/s days
- No new sanctions 14 c/s days
- No new violations of state law or probation conditions for 14 c/s days

Phase 2: Intensive Treatment

Eligible to advance to Phase 3 in approximately 90 days

- Continue to attend school full time (transfers to Polaris, Mountain Education Charter High School, or GED program must be approved by the Judge). Grades must be submitted to the coordinator weekly when school is in session.
- Complete Relapse Prevention Plan with help of the treatment provider.
- Work with Treatment Provider to develop a list of pro-social activities/interests and contacts.
- Attend weekly Case Management.
- Attend all scheduled court reviews.
- Attend all scheduled counseling sessions (Individual, group, or family) per individual treatment plan (minimum of **twelve (12)** sessions).
- Attend group treatment as directed (minimum of **twelve (12)** groups)
- Meet with Probation Officer as directed.
- Submit to all drug screens requested by Probation Officer, Compliance Officer or as directed by Coordinator.
- Be at home by curfew (8:00 PM).
- Pay \$30/month fees to the Juvenile Clerk's Office.
- Complete 2 hours of community service at an approved location.
- No positive screens for 30 c/s days
- No new sanctions 30 c/s days
- No new violations of state law or probation conditions for 30 c/s days

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Phase 3: Recovery Skills Development: Treatment, Self-Help, Life Skills

Eligible to advance to Phase 4 in approximately 90 days

- Continue to attend school full time (transfers to Polaris, Mountain Education Charter High School, or GED program must be approved by the Judge). Grades must be submitted to coordinator weekly when school is in session.
- Attend bi-weekly Case Management.
- Attend court reviews as directed. (once per month in phase 3, unless otherwise directed)
- Attend all scheduled counseling sessions, per individual treatment plan.
- Attend group treatment as directed.
- Integrate pro-social activities a minimum of twice per month.
- Meet with Probation Officer as directed.
- Submit to all drug screens requested by Probation Officer, Compliance Officer or as directed by Coordinator.
- Be at home by curfew (9:00 PM).
- Pay \$30/month fees to the Juvenile Clerk's Office.
- Complete 2 hours of community service at an approved location.
- No positive screens or sanctions for 45 c/s days
- No new violations of state law or probation conditions for 45 c/s days

Phase 4: Transition and Aftercare

Eligible to advance to Phase 5 in approximately 90 days

- Continue to attend school full time (transfers to Polaris, Mountain Education Charter High School, or GED program must be approved by the Judge).
- Attend monthly Case Management.
- Attend court reviews as directed. (once per month in phase 4, unless otherwise directed)
- Attend all scheduled counseling sessions, per individual treatment plan.
- Attend group treatment as directed.
- Integrate pro-social activities at least once per week.
- Meet with Probation Officer as directed.
- Submit to all drug screens requested by Probation Officer, Compliance Officer, or as directed by Coordinator.
- Be at home by curfew (10:00 PM).
- Pay \$30/month fees to the Juvenile Clerk's Office.
- No positive screens for 60 c/s days
- No new sanctions 60 c/s days
- No new violations of state law or probation conditions for 60 c/s days
- Complete 4 hours of community service at an approved location, present during court

### Phase 5: Continuing Care

Eligible to graduate in approximately 65 days

- Continue to attend school full time-must send grades to coordinator weekly
- Attend any schedule counseling sessions, per individual treatment plan
- Complete updated relapse prevention plan with help of treatment provider
- Meet with Probation officer as directed
- Attend court reviews as directed. (once per month in phase 5, unless otherwise directed)
- Submit to all drug screens requested by Probation Officer, Compliance Officer, or as directed by Coordinator
- Be home by curfew (10:00 PM)
- Pay \$30/month fees to the Juvenile Clerk's Office
- No positive screens for 90 c/s days before being deemed eligible for graduation
- No new sanctions for 65 consecutive days
- No new violations of state law or probation conditions for 65 consecutive days
- Complete the request for graduation.
- Complete the exit survey with the Coordinator

### **Phase Movement**

Each participant will be given their own requirements/goals of each phase. All fees, sanctions, assignments, and requirements must be completed before permission is granted to advance to the next phase.

### **Phase promotion**

PATH program participants are required to meet the requirements and objectives of each phase. Phase promotions are earned through compliance and active participation within the program. Participants will be considered for Phase promotion once they have met Phase requirements and have mastered and retained the skills they have learned. Upon phase promotion, the Judge may ask participants:

- Why he/she believes they should progress to the next level
- Identify how he/she has demonstrated the skills and lessons learned in the phase
- If they are familiar with the requirements and responsibilities of the next Phase
- To identify behaviors or goals to work on in the next phase
- The parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be welcome to make statements regarding the child's progress

### **Graduation Requirements**

In Phase 5, participants must complete a *request for graduation*, as well as schedule an exit interview with the coordinator.

### **Termination**

Termination from the program will be the final decision of the Judge with the team's input. If a participant is a danger to the physical or mental well-being of others, in violation of program rules, or has a new arrest and/or conviction on new charges, termination could be enforced. Termination might also be enforced if the participant is caught tampering with urine samples, dealing/selling/buying alcohol, drugs, or drug-using paraphernalia. All terminations (other than when a participant asks to leave) will require a notice, a hearing, and a fair procedure.

### **Community Service**

Each Participant will complete a total of ten (10) hours of community service while in the program. A minimum of two (2) hours community service (per phase) is required in Phases 1-3. You are required to complete a minimum of four (4) hours in Phase 4. The community service activity and location must be approved by the Coordinator in advance. Unapproved locations may not count towards the phase requirement. You are encouraged to seek out locations and projects that are of interest to you or play into one of your strengths. The Case Manager, Treatment Provider, and Probation Officer will assist in identifying these locations

- A minimum of ten (10) service hours documented on a timesheet
- No payment or credit of any kind may be received for the service provided.
- Community Service must be completed in Cherokee County

In Phase 4 you will complete a four (4) hour project and present the information about your service in court for the PATH Team and Participants. This is required for Graduation.

Community service could also be used as a sanction to other participants in various stages as seen fit by the Judge.

### **Absences**

All absences from treatment or court must be approved ahead of time. Most absences will not be excused for those in phase one or two. If a participant is out sick, a doctor's note must be provided the next day. Unexcused absences from court will result in a sanction, which could be incarceration.

### **Emergencies**

If participants experience an emergency, they should call the program coordinator as soon as possible and advise them of the situation. If the participant were to miss a treatment session, they must bring in official documentation.

### **Medications**

All medications need to be reported to the treatment provider at the initial assessment and whenever prescriptions are added or changed. The participant will be asked to bring the coordinator all written prescriptions or medication bottles for documentation in their record. Participants will be given a list of non-approved medications for the program at intake. The list

will cover prescriptions as well as over the counter medications that could interfere with drug screens. All participants will need to inform their doctors that they are in a drug intervention program in recovery. Failure to report prescriptions to coordinator and treatment provider will result in a sanction if a participant should test positive on their drug screens.

### **Participant Records**

Each participant will have two official records. One will be kept by the court and will include assessment information, releases, court orders, and program contract. The other will be maintained by the treatment provider and will contain such documents as assessments, program notes, and attendance records.

### **Updating of Policy and Procedure Manual**

This policy and procedure manual should be reviewed annually by the team and updated as needed.

## **AGREEMENT MODIFICATIONS**

Any individual agency wishing to amend and/or modify this Agreement will notify the coordinator of this issue(s). The coordinator will present the issue(s) to the Steering Team for the purpose of modifying and/or amending the Agreement. The issues will be decided by consensus (if possible) or by simple majority, if not.

## **TERMINATION OF AGREEMENT**

Individual agencies contemplating termination of their participation in this Agreement shall first notify the coordinator of their concerns. The coordinator shall attempt to resolve the program to ensure continuation of the treatment court. If the coordinator is unable to resolve the concern, the issue(s) will be presented to the Steering Team to reach a resolution. If unable to resolve the problem, the individual agency or department can exercise its right to terminate this Agreement by notifying all other agencies in writing a minimum of sixty (60) days prior to such termination.