

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

March 26, 2021



Louisiana

[Drug courts save lives, it is time we fund them](#)

L'Observateur

For the last year, I [Jeff Landry, Attorney General of Louisiana] have worked with stakeholders from across Louisiana on the Drug and Specialty Courts Commission. During that time – we noticed numerous sources showing drug courts reduce crime, reduce drug use, and reduce costs to taxpayers. We also unfortunately observed a recent reduction in participation and a lack of funding to grow these lifesaving programs.

The Commission sought a solution to these financing hurdles and asked what should be done with likely settlements between Louisiana and those who have proliferated the opioid crisis.

Rather than the monies going to more-of-the-same, wasteful government spending – we proposed it go to repairing the damage caused by the epidemic and improving the safety of all our State's citizens. That proposal is becoming legislation authored by Senator Rick Ward, which would dedicate funding to drug and specialty courts in Louisiana.

Virginia

[Drug overdoses spike in region](#)

Northern Virginia Daily

Drug overdoses in the region are on the rise again and law enforcement and treatment officials are highlighting the need for recovery programs.

There have been three fatal overdoses and 13 non-fatal overdoses since March 9, the Northwest Virginia Regional Drug and Gang Task Force reported in a news release on Monday.

A similar spike in overdoses was reported by the task force after federal stimulus money was received by the public in April 2020.

“The recent increase in opioid-related overdoses is likely a combination of received federal stimulus money and the presence of fentanyl,” the release states. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, and 2 milligrams of it is potentially deadly for the average person, the release states.

“Addiction is such a complex disease,” [Lauren Cummings, executive director of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Substance Abuse Coalition] said while adding that substance use isn’t really the issue at hand. The issue lies more with underlying mental health issues that lead to the addiction of substances, whether it is drugs or alcohol, Cummings said.

Discussion of adding a drug court program in Warren County has begun, Cummings said, but it would require a treatment organization in the area to provide services to people who go through it. It would also take buy-in from a judge, Cummings said.

Virginia

[The epidemic inside the pandemic: How COVID-19 affected the opioid crisis](#)

WDBJ

WDBJ is taking a fresh look at Appalachia’s opioid crisis: the epidemic inside of the pandemic. In the series, “Bridging the Great Health Divide,” WDBJ examines the pandemic’s role in deepening the [opioid] crisis, and the bridges people in our communities are building to bring hope to those who need it most.

The [Engaging Martinsville Henry County](#) team has been working for two years to find solutions and bring education programs to local classrooms. This month, they submitted an application to the Supreme Court to establish a drug court in the 21st Circuit.

If approved, they aim to implement it as soon as October.

West Virginia

[After difficult year, 21 graduate from Boone and Lincoln treatment courts](#)

Charleston Gazette-Mail

Operating in only three counties — Boone, Ohio and Randolph — the family treatment courts have been a success, said Boone County Circuit Judge Will Thompson.

[House Bill 2918](#), introduced by lawmakers this session, would expand family treatment courts into a statewide, permanent program. Although it has yet to be brought onto the House Judiciary agenda, Thompson said he’s hopeful.

The program is keeping families together, or reuniting them sooner, he said. People who might not have gotten help before now have another option that prioritizes their families. It was always his intention to make this a program for every West Virginian.

“If you talk to any circuit judge in West Virginia, they’ll tell you the part of their docket they least enjoy is abuse and neglect,” Thompson said. “They’re draining cases. There are constant failures, and success often is limited and so rare. [Family treatment court] is a different way to tackle those cases, and I think it’s giving people hope – hope that success and recovery is possible. That they can do it, and families don’t have to be broken.”