



Opioids and the Courts News: Jan. 4-11, 2019

Connecticut

[Task Force Recommends No Special State Courts for Opioid Addicts](#)

Connecticut Law Tribune

A 14-member task force composed of judges, attorneys and health officials have recommended not creating special state courts for defendants addicted to opioids. It instead recommended focusing on treatment plans already in place in Connecticut.

The task force, which released its [73-page report](#) to the state Judiciary Committee on Jan. 1, opted against mirroring Buffalo, New York, which established the country's first-ever opioid intervention court in May 2017. That court was funded, in part, by a three-year, \$300,000 federal grant.

Task force members told the Connecticut Law Tribune Thursday they made recommendations based on cost and other options, such as the Treatment Pathway Program, already in place.

In addition, members said, the Buffalo example is a drain on resources.

“In Buffalo, people appear in court every single day, five days a week. It is quite a tremendous allocation of resources,” said [Robert Devlin Jr.](#), assistant administrative judge and a member of the task force. “Even the judge in Buffalo, who advocated it, said it’s a resource-intensive approach and a very expensive program.” In Buffalo, Devlin said, “They come to court everyday to monitor their adherence to their plan for overcoming drug addiction.” It’s not clear how much it costs Buffalo to operate its two drug courts, including one devoted solely to opioids.

Task force members said they believe the opioid crisis should be looked at as a public health concern, not a criminal justice issue.

“Opioids are a serious problem in our state,” Devlin said. “We are open to looking at this from the lens of public health. What are the public health resources?”

Connecticut

[State panel recommends against creating special opioid court](#)

Hartford Courant

A Connecticut task force on Wednesday recommended against creating special state courts to serve people addicted to opioids, citing successful drug treatment programs already in place and the high cost of establishing such new courts.

The panel, which includes top state criminal justice officials and the state's mental health and addiction services commissioner, released its final report to the legislature's Judiciary Committee.



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The task force was created amid the nation's opioid overdose crisis under legislation approved by lawmakers and Democratic Gov. Dannel P. Malloy during the 2018 legislative session. More than 1,000 people in Connecticut died from accidental drug overdoses in 2017, and 2018's total is expected to be about the same.

The panel cited the state Judicial Branch's Treatment Pathway Program that is running in state courts in Bridgeport, New London, Torrington and Waterbury, and it recommended it be expanded to all state courts. The program helps people charged with nonviolent drug crimes obtain addiction treatment, medication, housing and other needs.

Indiana

[Rush to give 2019 State of the Judiciary next week](#)

Indiana Lawyer

In [last year's address](#) titled "A Hope-Filled Future," [Chief Justice Loretta] Rush heavily discussed the opioid crisis.

Montana

[Lawmakers look to monitor opioids, expand treatment](#)

Great Falls Tribune

[Republican Attorney General Tim] Fox's office said another legislative priority for the attorney general would be to expand specialty courts in the state, specifically those for drug treatment.

"Right now, the emphasis is on treatment courts, diverting people from incarceration and into treatment," said John Barnes, a spokesman for the Department of Justice. Bills passed in 2017 centered on this philosophy as well, with mandatory minimum sentences removed for possession of marijuana along with jail time for a first-time possession charge.

Currently, drug offenders make up most of Montana's prison population, according to the Department of Corrections.

Established in 1996, drug courts offer rehabilitation services for offenders in order to prevent them from entering the prison system. A 2017 report from Montana's legislature showed a decrease in recidivism among those who completed treatment through a drug court.

Montana

[Most Montanans don't have access to drug treatment courts, despite their effectiveness, report says](#)

Helena Independent Record



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“Treatment courts are the most researched and effective criminal justice intervention we have for defendants with substance use disorders,” said Beth McLaughlin, the Montana Supreme Court Administrator, in a press release announcing the report. “However, many people in Montana that need these services still do not have access to them.”

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Rep. Zach Brown, D-Bozeman, plans to carry a bill sponsored by Attorney General Tim Fox in the Montana Legislature to enact a wholesale tax on opioids. While the proceeds would fund treatment courts in the state, initial revenue projections were not immediately available.

New York

[New Syracuse opioid court aims to tackle epidemic, save lives](#)

Syracuse.com

Syracuse City Court is opening a new drug court today designed to get opioid addicts facing criminal charges into treatment as soon as possible.

The program is modeled after [Buffalo’s 2-year-old opioid intervention court](#), the first of its kind in the nation.

Syracuse City Court Judge Rory McMahon, who is presiding over the new court, said the program’s goal is to save lives.

“Getting them to see one more sunset will be my goal every day,” said McMahon, who lost a cousin to a drug overdose two years ago.

