

Opioids and the Courts

In the News: January 24, 2020



Indiana

[State of the Judiciary - Connecting, Convening, and Collaborating with our Communities](#)

Indiana Courts

After three years of my co-chairing the [National Judicial Opioid Task Force](#), three truths stand out. First, those with opioid use disorder are 13 times more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Second, the justice system is the single-largest referral source to get someone to treatment. And third, the justice system must treat opioid and substance abuse disorders as chronic, treatable brain diseases—and not as moral failures.

Judges must better understand addiction, treatment, and recovery. We have already pulled in Indiana's best and brightest to train our judges on the science of addiction and evidence-based treatment. Thank you, Family and Social Services Administration Director Dr. Jennifer Sullivan and Dr. Leslie Hulvershorn, for providing large doses of judicial education on what works. Together, we form a strong alliance combating the addiction epidemic.

This epidemic, in no small part, has caused our jail populations to increase. And it is one more very pressing reason to examine and reform how we do business in our criminal justice system.

Maine

[Two respected judges step down after leading court reforms in Maine](#)

Press Herald

The two judges [Justice Roland Cole and Justice Nancy Mills] oversaw high-profile cases that made headlines in Maine. But they also served as the incarcerated population increased both [nationally](#) and [in Maine](#), and they founded alternative tracks in the court system that are meant to divert vulnerable people from jails and prisons. Enrollment in those programs has increased steadily as the opioid crisis has taken its toll on Maine, and more than 260 people participated in all of the state's treatment courts in 2018, [the most recent year for which data was available](#).

Missouri

[Chief Justice of the Missouri Supreme Court notes his own historic tenure, court's bicentennial \(Audio and Text\)](#)

Missourinet

This legislative body passed the first treatment court legislation in 1998.

Twenty years later, as the state was grappling with the rising opioid epidemic, this body passed legislation standardizing the way our treatment courts operate and ensuring consistency for treatment court participants.

You also authorized our treatment courts to accept participants from locations with no local treatment court, vastly expanding the reach of services. In 2019, you restored core funding and appropriated additional funding to expand the full spectrum of treatment court services.

For all of these actions: thank you! As a result of this collaboration among all three branches of government, Missouri now has more than 100 counties served by more than 120 treatment courts – adult, juvenile, family, and DWI courts. And because of House Bill 547, which you also passed last year, we will have treatment courts established in every circuit in the state by August 2021.

The judiciary has also been hard at work to continue improving our treatment courts. During 2019, a task force met monthly to formulate rigorous standards ensuring ongoing consistency and effectiveness for our adult treatment courts. The state’s treatment court coordinating commission is scheduled to vote on these standards at its quarterly meeting at the end of this month.

Together, we have built a strong foundation from which our state can continue to fight the substance abuse crisis on multiple fronts – alcohol, opioids and, as health officials have forecast, another rise in methamphetamine use.

Tennessee

[The opioid crisis is sidelining valuable employees. Tennessee’s employers are learning how to fight back](#)

Jackson Sun

Debbie Tate, administrative director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, said employers should educate themselves just as her agency is educating judges about the realities of substance abuse and the effectiveness of medication-aided recovery.

Employers can help connect their employees to resources and treatment programs. They can receive free training on how to administer naloxone, a medication used to treat opioid overdose, from their local Tennessee Regional Overdose Prevention Specialists.