



Opioids and the Courts News: August 16, 2019

Kentucky

[Why Kentucky can't stop hurting — and killing — its children](#)

Courier-Journal

[Judge Tara] Hagerty, with Jefferson Family Court, which handles the state's heaviest volume of child abuse and neglect cases, says the opioid epidemic has overwhelmed the state.

"I think the opioid epidemic has just overwhelmed everyone," Hagerty said. "It's like a tsunami. ... It's hard for everybody to stay afloat."

Substance abuse by a caregiver was a factor in 53% of Kentucky child abuse and neglect cases in 2017, according to the federal report.

That put Kentucky second in the nation, just behind West Virginia, another state wracked by the drug epidemic.

Minnesota

[Treat or punish? Douglas County lacks treatment court for drug-related offenses](#)

Echo Press

Douglas County is part of a shrinking minority in Minnesota when it comes to not offering special courts to tackle the hardest substance-abuse cases.

Of Minnesota's 87 counties, 65 offer courts that seek to provide treatment for addiction instead of punishment to repeat offenders. Many of these courts have launched in the past five years, and several other counties are beginning the work to start their own. Commonly called "drug courts" or "DWI courts," they focus on people convicted of drug-related crimes or drunk-driving offenses, or a combination of the two.

"Treatment courts are one of the most researched and proven, effective criminal justice initiatives across the country and even across the world," said Abby Kuschel, state treatment court coordinator. "That's probably the driving force behind counties that want to implement them."

Douglas County has not offered a drug court, although interest surfaced at a recent opioid task force meeting in Alexandria when a guest speaker from the Eighth Judicial District said their court has seen defendants turn their lives around.



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North Carolina

[OPINION: The compelling case for drug-treatment courts](#)

BlueRidgeNow.com

Even so, some still question why we should fund specialized courts. They see these courts as being soft on crime and giving certain criminals special treatment. That's not what I saw in New Hanover County. I saw a way to effectively treat the root cause of much drug-related criminal activity and addiction, and a way to produce productive members of society who have less chance of reoffending. A 2011 National Institute of Justice found that "drug court offenders were significantly less likely than the comparison group to report engaging in any criminal behavior," with only 28 percent of participants reoffending, as opposed to 40 percent of comparison offenders.

But why should you care now? Two words: opioid epidemic. The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services documents that between 1999 and 2016, there have been more than 12,000 deaths from opioid-related overdoses, with almost 7,500 opioid overdose emergency department visits in 2017.

Today it's opioids, but in 1989, crack cocaine spurred the creation of the first drug court in Miami. Like the opioid epidemic, cocaine-related crime flooded the justice system with addicts who consistently reoffended.

Buncombe County Judge Alan Thornburg recalled both the crack and opioid epidemic in a 2018 article in the Asheville Citizen-Times: "We treat them as individuals and not just numbers in the system," he said of the recovery court.

The newspaper recounted the experience of Hope Bishop, who overcame struggles with opioid addiction through these specialized courts. "They don't just look at me like an addict in drug court and it gives me confidence to just look at myself like that too," she told the newspaper.

Tennessee

[Kustoff Hosts Opioids Roundtable With Local Leaders](#)

Office of Rep. David Kustoff

Congressman David Kustoff (TN-08) hosted an opioid roundtable with U.S Attorney-Mike Dunavant, Pharmacist-Jason Kizer, High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Director-Brian Chambers, District Attorney for the 25th Judicial District-Mark Davidson, and Drug Task Force for the 25th Judicial District- John Thompson. They discussed community and law enforcement resources to help combat the opioid epidemic, the role of doctors and pharmacists and how they can help their patients, and new non-opioid related medication for people in hospitals experiencing pain.



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“In 2017 in Tennessee, there were 1,269 overdose related deaths--a rate of 19.3 deaths per 100,000 people. The national rate is 14.6 deaths per 100,000 people. That statistic is simply devastating and we owe it to our families and loved ones to take stronger action to fight back against this plague,” said Rep. Kustoff. “During this opioid roundtable, we discussed new ideas to better combat the opioid crisis and learned what methods are truly effective. If we want to make inroads towards ending this urgent public health crisis, these conversations must continue and ideas must be implemented.”

In Congress, Congressman Kustoff is leading the fight against this crisis. He recently re-introduced the Substance Tableting and Encapsulating Enforcement and Registration (STEER) Act. This bill will combat the opioid crisis by cracking down on counterfeit pill makers.

Wisconsin

[How the opioid crisis struck Jefferson County and how the community came together to fight it](#)

Daily Jefferson County Union

If the path of an addict in Jefferson County starts with an opioid prescription from a pharmacy such as Fort HealthCare and at some point involves interactions with law enforcement, it’s potential end goes through Craig Holler.

Holler has been the coordinator for the Jefferson County Drug Treatment Court Program since 2017.

As is the case in any public health crisis, there are two ways to look at the problem.

There’s the view from 30,000 feet — 15.7 million opioid pills distributed over seven years and countless lives affected. But there’s also the view from ground level. Holler, as the coordinator of drug treatment court and a member of the drug free coalition, is able to see both views.

At both levels, what Holler sees is a community doing what it can to solve the problem through collaboration and creatively using the limited resources it has.

On the ground, drug treatment court itself is a collaboration between a judge, the district attorney, public defenders, probation officers, substance abuse counselors, law enforcement, Holler himself and case managers.

“We get together from all these different points of view and try to come to a consensus as to what’s the best direction this person can take to achieve sobriety or maintain sobriety or better their lives long term,” Holler said.