

# Opioid-Related News and the Courts

## Weekly Review

June 2, 2023



### National

#### [America's Approach to Addiction Has Gone Off the Rails](#)

The Atlantic

“You’d think fentanyl would cause people to pause; it does not,” says Mary Ellen Diekhoff, a drug-court judge in Monroe County, Indiana. What has caused more people to opt into her court, Diekhoff told me—and what has also strengthened their engagement with the process the court requires—is a recent modification to state law making it more likely that those with the lowest-level drug felonies may face prison. “Treatment is not easy,” she said. “If there’s no impetus to stay, why would you? You need to have something to lose.”

### National

#### [Pandemic Procedures: Adapting Problem-Solving Court \(PSC\) Operations and Treatment Protocols During COVID-19](#)

Journal of Drug Issues

With an ongoing pandemic claiming hundreds of lives a day, it is unclear how COVID-19 has affected court operations, particularly problem-solving courts (PSCs) which have goals rooted in rehabilitation for participants in their programs. Even with practical recommendations from national organizations directing courts on how to manage COVID-19, whether and how PSCs met the needs of PSC participants during this time is underexplored. This study, drawn from a larger national study using a survey of PSC coordinators, examines the COVID-19 responses of PSCs to remain safely operational for participants. A sub-sample of survey respondents (n = 82 PSC coordinators) detailed how the COVID-19 pandemic led to changes to their court and treatment operations amidst the constraints of the pandemic. The courts’ shifts in policy and practice have important impacts for court participants’ treatment retention and success in the PSC program, and these shifts need more in-depth research in the future.

### Alabama

#### [‘We care about you’: Montgomery County judge relays impact of treatment court programs](#)

The Reporter

Judge Steven T. O’Neill approached the podium during a recent Montgomery County Commissioners meeting to discuss a subject of importance to him: treatment court.

The Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas judge began his work with treatment court in 2006, with the ultimate goal of helping the people who come before him in his courtroom.

“(It’s) trying to get a system in this county where we say we care. We care about you,” O’Neill said. “We understand the disease, we understand mental health disorders, we understand what veterans face in this country, and we care.”

## **Arizona**

### [Treatment courts save lives and strengthen communities](#)

Silver Belt

The Gila County Opioid Drug Court serves those high-risk/high-need individuals in our community who suffer from opioid addiction and are in need of medication assisted treatment. The purpose is to help criminal justice-involved individuals with opioid addiction get on the path to recovery and become contributing members of our community. The Gila County Superior Court and Probation Department work with treatment provider Community Bridges to provide substance abuse treatment and medication assisted treatment services, along with consistent probation interaction, to those clientele in need with the main goal to save lives.

The research agrees: Numerous studies have found that treatment courts reduce crime and drug use and save money. These programs also improve education, employment, housing, financial stability and family reunification, which reduces foster care placements. Treatment courts represent a compassionate approach to the devastation of addiction.

## **Pennsylvania**

### [Secret meetings by board overseeing Pa.’s \\$1 billion in opioid settlements draw criticism](#)

York Dispatch

The trust exists as a result of a historic agreement with Johnson & Johnson and three major drug distributors that faced a host of lawsuits for their role in the opioid epidemic. Under the national agreements, the companies did not admit wrongdoing.

In July, a Commonwealth Court judge signed an order creating a 13-member trust with the responsibility to distribute funds and provide oversight of an estimated \$1 billion from that deal, as well as money from future similar settlements. The trust includes officials appointed by the governor, legislative leaders, the mayor of Philadelphia, and the Allegheny County executive. County leaders in different regions of the state also vote on representatives to the board. VanKirk began serving as chair under former Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf.

The order creating the board stated that the “proceedings and meetings of this Trust shall be governed by the Sunshine Act,” and it defined a quorum of the trust as seven members.

## **Utah**

### [County weighs opioid settlement spending](#)

Chronicle Progress

Finlinson said the funds needed to go toward addiction remediation efforts within the county. He said some of the options available were to spend the funds on existing programs, such as those offered by Central Utah Mental Health, the local Drug Court program, or various law enforcement programs, including addiction treatment in jail.

