

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

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Louisiana

[Over 300 dead in another record year for overdose deaths as city leaders grapple with solutions](#)

The Advocate

As [Janzlean Laughinghouse, executive director of Capital Area Human Services] and others have repeatedly emphasized, substance abuse is a brain disease that can only be cured through treatment.

This is not a belief that has always been widely held.

Cheryl Wyatt, who acts as [Recovery Court](#) director for the 19th Judicial District Court, noted that certain treatment options were not used in their program until recently because they were not understood. Recovery court offers treatment services to people using substances who wind up in the criminal justice system.

“Probably up until three years ago, [MAT \(medically assisted treatment\)](#) was not permitted because it was seen at that time as one drug replacing another drug,” she said. “So, we’ve educated ourselves that this is a disease.”

Medically assisted treatment involves using less addictive drugs like Suboxone or methadone to wean people off opioids, combined with counseling and behavioral therapies. Additionally, the court works to educate loved ones on signs of substance misuse so they can prevent relapses or overdoses.

Michigan

[Judge Longo Offering Free Narcan at Ferndale Courthouse](#)

Oakland County Times

Judge Joseph Longo, head judge of the 43rd District Court in Ferndale, has seen an ever-increasing number of people in his courtroom on cases related to opioid addiction. That’s why he and his staff are doing something rare in community courthouses – offering free Narcan (naloxone) to anyone who wants it, no questions asked.

Working with Families Against Narcotics to acquire the life-saving medicine, Longo hopes that people who have drug problems and those who know people that do will feel comfortable asking for it at the desk. It doesn’t matter what city the person is from or why they are there. It’s for anyone to take and have in case they might be in a position to save a life.

Pennsylvania

[County set to appoint opioid settlement committee](#)

Meadville Tribune

Crawford County commissioners are set to name representatives to a committee that will recommend how to use the county's share of the national opioid litigation settlement.

At their work session Wednesday, commissioners reviewed seven names for the committee: Anita Robinson, executive director of Crawford County Drug and Alcohol Commission; Jason Nesbitt, executive director of Center for Family Services; Samantha Stump of St. James Haven; John Slater, staff pharmacist of Titusville Area Hospital; President Judge John Spataro of Crawford County Court of Common Pleas; and Laurel Learn and Troy Stininger, two at-large members.

Pennsylvania

[Editorial: Courts and doctors must cooperate on addiction](#)

Tribune-Review

Opioids, however, can bring the legal and medical spheres into conflict.

That happened this month when the U.S. Department of Justice sent a letter to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts explaining that policies in at least two counties — Jefferson and Northumberland — violated federal law by telling people to stop taking life-saving addiction medications. The policies violate the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, according to the Justice Department.

The letter notes that the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas Mental Health Court requires court approval for these types of medications and that approval is rare.

Opioid Use Disorder is the name for a federally recognized condition for people physically and psychologically dependent on opioids including prescription painkillers and street drugs such as heroin or fentanyl. OUD has a variety of treatments that might include prescriptions for things including buprenorphine, methadone or naltrexone that can counter the cravings for opioids. In fact, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration helps connect people with information about these treatments.

Rhode Island

[A RI city and judge start new approach for petty offenses driven by addiction. Here's why](#)

Providence Journal

When Superior Court Judge Kristin E. Rodgers assumed the bench in 2009, she took the view that the crimes themselves must be punished, regardless of the driving force behind them.

“I was one of those people who believed in progressive punishment,” Rodgers said in a recent interview. As the judge presiding over the courtroom that handled people accused of violating their probation, that was exactly what she did.

Rodgers’ perspective on criminal justice and the use of heroin or other illicit drugs began to shift in 2019 with her participation in the [New England Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative](#). Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell selected Rodgers and Family Court Magistrate Paul Jones to take part in a regional discussion contemplating how state courts could better respond to the opioid epidemic.

With that grew her understanding and appreciation that substance-use disorders are a medical condition, not a moral failing, she said.

“Substance-use disorder is an illness. When a person has cancer, we don’t penalize them. We treat it with kindness and compassion,” Rodgers said in her chambers in the Licht Judicial Complex.

Pennsylvania

[Recovery experts to Pa. lawmakers: Addiction meds can save lives, enhance treatment](#)

Tribune Democrat

The advocacy comes two weeks after a Department of Justice investigation found that Northumberland and Jefferson county courts forced people under mandated supervision to quit using doctor-prescribed buprenorphine or risk incarceration, which investigators say is a violation of their civil rights.

Other counties are believed to have done the same, and the Justice Department sought voluntary noncompliance negotiations with the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania to educate court officials on the legalities and benefits of medication-assisted treatments.

“That would be like telling a diabetic that you can no longer use insulin,” said state Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Lycoming. Yaw chairs the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a bicameral and bipartisan legislative policy agency, and has been a lead advocate for drug and alcohol treatment in the General Assembly.

A Justice Department spokesperson on Wednesday confirmed that court system officials contacted the department but wouldn’t say whether or not they agreed to enter negotiations. A spokesperson for the Unified Judicial System declined to comment.

Tennessee

[TDMHSAS Publishes Videos Highlighting Tennessee's Recovery Courts](#)

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) is publishing a series of 12 new videos highlighting individuals who work in Tennessee's Recovery Courts. Tennessee has a total of 82 Recovery Courts, Veterans Treatment Courts, Mental Health Courts, Juvenile and Family, and DUI courts which offer a rigorous program of treatment, testing, and therapy as an alternative to incarceration.

The video profiles feature professionals at all levels of the court system from judges and prosecutors to program coordinators, case workers, and even one court graduate who is now employed providing peer support in a court. Courts featured in the profile serve a wide range of communities from the largest cities in Tennessee to some of the state's most rural counties.

