

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

December 2, 2022



Illinois

[Ashna Arora and Panka Bencsik: Chicago program aims to reduce substance abuse — without punishment](#)

Chicago Tribune

Realizing that harsh sentences alone failed to limit drug use, policymakers turned to drug courts, which mandate substance use treatment and ongoing drug testing in lieu of prison time. Today, half of all U.S. counties [have at least one operating drug court](#), and Congress recently made [\\$750 million](#) available to help expand them.

This approach centers treatment but continues to assume that people need to be motivated by external factors — such as the threat of criminal sanctions — to enter recovery. Here in Cook County, participants [are required](#) to plead guilty, participate in mandatory drug testing, and remain on probation for two years. As a result, these drug courts continue people’s entanglement with the criminal justice system, including the creation of a criminal record that can harm their chances of getting employment down the road. And because the monitoring of people that drug courts involve is so resource-intensive, it means that drug courts usually operate at just a tiny scale — often serving only a [few dozen](#) individuals each year.

Michigan

[County undecided on slow-to-come drug settlement money use](#)

The Alpena News

Addiction fuels a vast percentage of the crimes that land people in the courtroom and in jail, contributing to larcenies, assaults, break-ins, and other unlawful conduct that hurts the community, [Alpena County Sheriff Erik Smith] said.

Combatting the addiction that drives the drug trade could slow the flow of drugs northward, but “it won’t stop unless you cut the head off the snake,” he said.

All the same, Smith said fighting drug crime and drug harm requires a multi-pronged approach, including education and rehabilitation.

Advocates fighting addiction in Alpena agree. Multiple agencies have suggested the settlement money be used to reconfigure Alpena’s drug court, provide addiction recovery housing, up the number of peer recovery coaches in the community, or bolster drug education in schools.

Pennsylvania

[Lancaster County Prison testing medication-assisted treatment program for opioid use disorder](#)

Lancaster Online

President Judge David Ashworth, who is on the board of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and oversees the county's drug court program, said the association supports medication-assisted treatment programs in correctional facilities.

County Commissioner Josh Parsons said medication-assisted treatment programs are starting to be considered best-practices. The county has marked the program to receive financial support from its share of a national opioid settlement, he said.

Virginia

[Explainer: What can, and can't, Isle of Wight do with its opioid settlement money?](#)

Smithfield Times

Isle of Wight already partners with Suffolk to fund a regional "drug court," which moves nonviolent offenses committed by addicted people to a separate docket from regular criminal court. Chief Judge Carl Eason Jr. estimated to the Suffolk News-Herald in 2021 that around 70% of cases coming through the Fifth Judicial Circuit — which encompasses Isle of Wight, Suffolk, Franklin and Southampton — involve drugs, even if they aren't directly connected to a drug-related crime.

In December of that year, the Fifth Circuit reestablished its drug court. According to the News-Herald, a drug court had previously served Suffolk from about 2004 to 2008 but ended due to lack of funding. Roughly three years ago, public defender Elisabeth Culpepper proposed the idea of restarting Suffolk's drug court. In 2020, the state's Drug Treatment Court Advisory Committee gave the drug court its unanimous approval.

Virginia

[Counties deal with addiction](#)

Farmville Herald

...in Prince Edward, the focus is on using the money to clean up the damage already done by opioids.

That's happening in two ways. First, the county will work with the Piedmont Health District and Centra to help fund treatment and recovery programs. Second, the county is building interest in the region to create a drug court.

"This would provide an alternative means of dealing with addiction," [Prince Edward County Administrator Doug Stanley] said. "Drug courts are specialized programs that divert non-violent offenders from incarceration and into treatment and rehabilitation."

Currently, if someone gets arrested for substance abuse, they go to jail. Drug court instead offers them opportunities to attend classes or counseling, so they can change their behavior. If they comply, they don't have to serve time. It's also proven to work. Data from the National Institute of Justice shows recidivism, or repeat arrest, rates fall between 17% to 28% in areas with a drug court.

