

AG Schimel: And partners expand treatment court and diversion programs to fight drug epidemic

Posted on Tuesday, Aug 28, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. – More funding is now available for 50 Wisconsin counties and two tribes entering their third year of a five year grant cycle, to fund treatment and diversion programs today. Attorney General Brad Schimel has worked with the Department of Corrections (DOC), Health Services (DHS), Wisconsin State Courts, Wisconsin Public Defender's Office, and local partners to expand available treatment and diversion programs to combat the ongoing fight against opioids and methamphetamine. With increased funding, better data collection, formal program standards, and more training for treatment court and program staff, Wisconsin's Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) Program has expanded from seven counties utilizing \$700,000 in grant funding to 50 counties and two tribes utilizing \$6.5 million annually.

“After nearly 30 years as a prosecutor, I can say, without reservation, that treatment courts are the best thing the criminal justice system has ever done, and it's not only me that believes that,” said Attorney General Schimel. “The fact is district attorneys, police, social workers, public defenders and everyone in between – we all agree. We are finally recognizing that we cannot ‘incarcerate our way out of problems’ related to addiction. Yes, jail and prison are sometimes necessary parts of our approach to punish crime, but confinement alone will not change a person's disease or their behavior. Treatment courts utilize accountability and an opportunity to earn a second chance by demonstrating a commitment to sobriety and hard work. This approach ultimately makes our communities safer and healthier. Since 2015, DOJ has worked hard to not just increase treatment and diversion programs, but to make them more reliable and effective through data collection, training, and statewide standards.

The TAD program provides local jurisdictions with options to give offenders, as an opportunity to enter diversion programs or treatment court programs, a safe alternative to jail or prison confinement. Those options which typically involve drug and/or alcohol abuse treatment, case management, and other risk reduction services. Diverting non-violent offenders into substance abuse treatment keeps them out of jail and correctional facilities – thereby saving bed space and taxpayer dollars – as well as treating the underlying addiction that may have influenced them to commit a crime or may contribute to future criminal behavior.

“As Chief Judge of the Third Judicial District, I have seen firsthand the devastating impact the opioid epidemic has had on our communities,” said Hon. Jennifer Dorow, Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge and Chief Judge of the 3rd Judicial District. “Since 2014, TAD grant funding from Wisconsin DOJ has enabled Waukesha County to sustain its drug court program and serve over 120 justice-involved individuals with opioid use disorders, ultimately saving lives and reuniting families. We are grateful to DOJ for their continued support with TAD funding in 2019.”

The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for administering the program, in partnership with DOC, DHS, Director of State Courts Office, and State Public Defender’s Office.

“Our goal is to equip everyone we work with to live drug-free and crime-free in the community,” said Secretary Cathy Jess. “When an inmate steps into prison, they’ve already made a decision that has hurt the community they live in. Treatment and diversion program allow us to work with an offender before they’re incarcerated by pairing AODA treatment with strict accountability that holds an offender responsible for their success or failure.”

In the late 2000s, Wisconsin saw a rapid expansion in the number of treatment courts. These courts historically had been developed locally, absent funding or oversight from a state coordinator or governing body. This led to each local program being somewhat unique, and as treatment courts in Wisconsin have developed and evolved into a variety of models, they did so without the existence of universally accepted operational standards.

Recognizing a need to improve the functioning of treatment court programs, DOJ and system partners worked with the Wisconsin Association of Treatment Court Professionals (WATCP) to revise Wisconsin Treatment Court Standards. Partners then worked to develop training on these standards for local teams from counties

and tribes across Wisconsin. In 2015, the training received an overwhelming response from treatment court teams with over 500 in attendance, representing 71 out of 74 fully operational treatment courts in Wisconsin. Another training was held in 2017, with 140 participants from 29 counties and 11 full treatment court teams completed a training on treatment court standards.

In spring 2018 at the WATCP Annual Conference, a revised version of the Wisconsin Treatment Court Standards was presented to approximately 450 people, with support from DOJ and WATCP, and input from DOC, DHS, state courts, and public defenders.

Building on these treatment court standards, the Wisconsin Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), chaired by Attorney General Schimel and DOC Secretary Cathy Jess, is also developing statewide diversion program standards for pre-charge and post-charge diversion programs. These standards will provide a basis for implementation and training for all types of treatment alternative and diversion programs in the state. This set of standards is unique and believed to be the first of their kind in the nation. DOJ continues working with its partners to create and deploy training on these standards, statewide.

The Wisconsin State Legislature has voted to expand TAD funding multiple times: [2013 Wisconsin Act 197](#) expanded the TAD programs by \$1.5 million annually; [2015 Wisconsin Act 388](#) expanded TAD program funding by \$2 million. This legislation, signed into law by Governor Scott Walker, brought the total TAD expenditure to more than \$6 million.

In anticipation of more grant funding becoming available for more applicants, in 2016 DOJ offered grant writing training to interested applicants. The trainings were free and attended by local criminal justice coordinating council program coordinators and those who would be applying for the grant funding. The trainings were attended by approximately 120 people, and a recording of the training was also made available so applicants could refresh their training.

To support ongoing performance measurement and long-term evaluation of TAD and related programs across the state, in 2017 DOJ launched a data collection and reporting system for treatment courts and diversion programs throughout Wisconsin. The Comprehensive Outcome, Research, and Evaluation (CORE) Reporting System was designed by DOJ's Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis (BJIA) and developed with the DOJ Bureau of Computing Services (BCS). The system

is available at no charge to treatment courts and diversion programs for counties and tribes across the state – not just those receiving grant funding from DOJ. The CORE reporting system provides an integrated tool to collect more detailed data on treatment court and diversion program participants, which will allow sites to regularly monitor the progress of their programs and track longer term outcomes of these programs. An updated outcome evaluation of the TAD program will be conducted in 2019.

For more information on the TAD program, please visit the [Criminal Justice Coordinating Council website](#).