

Wisconsin Supreme Court: Grant programs expected to increase the number of juvenile and family drug-treatment court programs in Wisconsin

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Madison, Wis. – The number of juvenile and family drug-treatment court programs available in Wisconsin is expected to increase in coming years, thanks to new grant programs approved by the Legislature and Gov. Scott Walker.

Legislation signed into law earlier this month (2017 Wisconsin Acts 202 and 261) authorizes and funds grants to be administered by the state Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Once the program is established, counties and Native American Tribes may apply for grants to create evidence-based programs that screen, assess, and provide new dispositional alternatives and court procedures for parents whose children have come under the jurisdiction of the children's court, or for juveniles who have problems related to mental illness or substance abuse.

“This grant program is the result of all branches of state government, as well as local governments, working together to improve the effectiveness of our justice system for the people who rely on it most,” said Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief

Justice Patience Drake Roggensack.

The chief justice attended a bill signing ceremony for Act 202 at the Capitol on April 3, along with Director of State Courts Randy R. Koschnick. The chief justice chairs the Wisconsin Commission on Children, Families and the Courts, a multi-disciplinary commission focused on improving the processing of child abuse and neglect cases in the court system.

A county or tribe that operates a program funded by a family treatment court or juvenile treatment court grant must do all of the following, under the legislation:

Establish eligibility criteria for a person's participation in the program.

Provide services to program participants that are consistent with evidence-based practices in treatment services needed by those participants, including substance abuse treatment services, mental health treatment services, and intensive case management services.

Provide a multidisciplinary screen, as defined by statute, for program participants.

Provide a holistic and trauma-informed approach to the treatment of program participants and provide those participants with services that may be needed.

Integrate all services provided to program participants by state and local government agencies and other organizations.

The grant program was first proposed in 2015 by the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Problem-Solving Courts, Alternatives and Diversions at the prompting of Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge Mary Triggiano. Triggiano served on the study committee, along with La Crosse County Circuit Court Judge Elliott M. Levine. DCF played an integral role in supporting the legislation throughout the process.

The expansion of Family Drug Treatment Courts is also among recommendations from First Lady Tonette Walker's Fostering Futures initiative, as it incorporates the principles of trauma-informed care.

Milwaukee was the first county with a fully operating family drug treatment court program, which started Oct. 1, 2011. Success there has inspired other counties, including Jackson, Bayfield and more recently Walworth and Kenosha, to begin implementing their own programs. Kenosha County launched its new family drug

treatment court program, effective April 1.

In a similar effort, Barron County has established a reunification court, with a goal of reducing the time a child is in out-of-home care, and to work toward preventing the need for the termination of parental rights.

Statistics gathered by the Milwaukee County Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) program during its first five years in operation demonstrate the success of that effort. Children in the FDTC are 2.5 times more likely to be reunified with their parents and are nearly 50 percent less likely to continue in out-of-home care after a year as compared to children of substance using parents in a traditional court setting.

2017 Wisconsin Act 261 appropriated \$250,000 for fiscal year 2018-19 for the new grant programs.