

Governor Chris Christie Follows Through on Commitment to Reclaim Lives with Landmark, Bipartisan Mandatory Drug Court Law

Thursday, July 19, 2012

Tags: [Addiction Taskforce](#)

Phased-In Program will Provide Mandatory Treatment in All 21 Counties

Trenton, NJ – Today, Governor Chris Christie followed through on his commitment to take a smarter and more effective approach in how the state treats drug-addicted offenders by signing into law landmark, bipartisan legislation to put in place a statewide, mandatory drug court program. The legislation, S-881, acts on the principles laid out by Governor Christie in his January State of the State Address – that no life is disposable and that it is a commonsense, fiscal, and moral imperative to help individuals dealing with drug addiction reclaim their lives with treatment, rather than warehousing them in prison.

"When I outlined this proposal six months ago, I made it clear that our commitment to our most vulnerable was not just a matter of dollars and cents, it was about reclaiming lives. No life is disposable and every life can be redeemed, but not if we ignore them," said Governor Christie. "Once again by putting people before partisanship, we are providing optimism and hope to individuals and families torn apart by addiction. Once fully phased in over 5 years, this program will provide mandatory drug treatment to appropriate offenders who are not a threat to society and who suffer from the disease of addiction – redeeming lives and healing families."

Working in a bipartisan manner with the legislature to move forward on this critical issue, Governor Christie secured passage of this legislation that enables a statewide, mandatory drug court program to be implemented over the course of 5 years. Beginning one year after the enactment of the bill, the Administrative Director of the Courts will select 3 vicinages to begin the expansion, followed by the addition of 3 vicinages each year over the period of phase-in.

The Governor's plan for drug court expansion was first announced in his 2012 State of the State Address and reaffirmed in his Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Address when he called drug addiction a treatable disease and dedicated an additional \$2.5 million in funding for program expansion. That funding was secured in the Fiscal Year 2013 Budget signed into law by the Governor in June.

The program builds on the success of New Jersey's highly successful drug court program, by expanding it to provide mandatory treatment for drug-addicted offenders throughout all 21 New Jersey counties. While effective, the existing program only accommodates 1,400 new participants per year. As a voluntary program, it fails to overcome the biggest obstacle to addiction treatment – denial.

"We will no longer simply warehouse individuals in prison who are not a threat to society while the underlying cause of their criminality goes unaddressed. And we won't wait for them to come to the conclusion that they need treatment on their own. With this legislation we are building on our record of reducing recidivism, reclaiming lives by breaking the vicious cycle of crime and addiction, and doing so in a way that is less costly and more effective in getting results," said Governor Christie.

"Continuing to look to imprisonment as the only solution for nonviolent drug offenders is not only more costly to our taxpayers, but fails to deal with the underlying problem in these individuals' lives in the first place," said Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, a primary sponsor of the legislation. "By expanding on the success of the voluntary drug court program and reaching even more people through mandatory treatment in their sentencing, we can save taxpayer dollars and, more importantly, help these individuals get their lives back. I thank the Governor and my fellow bill sponsors for their work and commitment to making this important reform a reality for our state."

According to their October 2010 Drug Court Report, the rate at which drug court graduates are re-arrested for a new

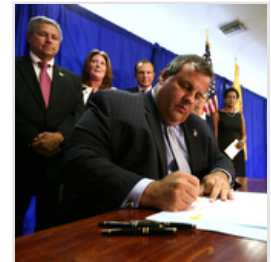
Stay Connected
with Social Media

Stay Connected
with Email Alerts

LIKE THIS PAGE? SHARE IT
WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

[SHARE](#) [f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [...](#)

Related Content



July 19, 2012 Drug Court Bill

[View More Photos](#)

indictable offense is 16% and the reconviction rate is 8%. This is compared to re-arrest rates for drug offenders released from prison that stands at 54% with a re-conviction rate of 43%. According to that report, an average institutional cost per inmate is approximately \$38,900, whereas the cost for an active drug court participant is roughly \$11,379.

Under this legislation, mandatory participation in a drug treatment program for eligible nonviolent, drug-addicted offenders could be sentenced by a judge, regardless of whether they apply for admission to the drug court program.

The law also requires that within one year following the effective date, and annually for five years thereafter, the Administrative Director of the Courts must submit an evaluation of the program to the Governor and the Legislature. The report will include completion and recidivism rates, implementation costs, and any other information relevant to the success of the program.

In addition, the legislation provides for:

Increased identification of eligible drug addicted nonviolent offenders. As part of this effort, information on drug addiction and treatment would be required to be given to those charged with second and third drug degree offenses.

Court ordered clinical assessment to determine suitability for drug court. Pre-sentencing reports would be required to include information regarding drug addiction and recommendations regarding whether an assessment should be ordered for a defendant.

Courts to make a finding regarding addiction for any offender having a clinical assessment. If offenders are found to be drug addicted, meeting present drug court eligibility factors and are prison bound, then those offenders would be sentenced to the drug court program regardless of their desire to enter the program.

Judges to be given ultimate discretion in determining whether an individual poses a threat to society and should not be sent to a drug treatment facility as part of his or her sentencing.

Primary sponsors of the bill are Senator Raymond Lesniak (D-Union), Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-Middlesex, Somerset and Union), Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Hunterdon and Mercer), Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (D-Bergen), Assemblywoman Annette Quijano (D-Union), and Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi (R-Bergen and Passaic).

###

Press Contact:

Michael Drewniak
Kevin Roberts
609-777-2600



[Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Legal Statement & Disclaimers](#) | [Accessibility Statement](#) | 

Statewide: [NJ Home](#) | [Services A to Z](#) | [Departments/Agencies](#) | [FAQs](#)
Office of the Governor: [Home](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Media](#) | [Administration](#) | [NJ's Priorities](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2018
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000