

# W.VA. REGIONAL JAIL STARTS INPATIENT TREATMENT PILOT

*Posted on February 21, 2019 by Tyler Barker*



CHARLESTON, WV (WOAY) – For the first time, West Virginia has begun offering inpatient substance abuse treatment to jail-housed inmates via court referral. The promising pilot launched at the Western Regional Jail aims to break the cycle of addiction, save lives, and reduce crime and incarceration costs.

Circuit judges in the counties served by the jail have started sending eligible offenders to the program. The pilot provides individual and group therapy daily as well as medication-assisted treatment in qualifying cases. It has a capacity of 32 beds each for men and women, in separate sections and away from other jail inmates.

“Our goal is to return people so they can become contributing and productive members of society,” said Corrections and Rehabilitation Commissioner Betsy Jviden, who links this effort with her agency’s emphasis on strong reentry programs that assist with housing and employment.

The pilot is voluntary and open only to non-violent offenders. The inpatient treatment is in lieu of a regular sentence, and is expected to take at least six months. If successfully completed, the treatment term would lead to a reduced sentence, supervised release or some other alternative to



further incarceration.

"We've tried to make this a judge-led program," said Assistant Commissioner and Inspector General Gary Johnson. "We leave it up to them as to who comes and what happens when we send (inmates) back to them after they finish the program."

Specially trained recovery coaches will continue to work with these individuals upon release as they rejoin their communities. These offenders would also be eligible for injections of naltrexone (Vivitrol), which blocks the effects of opioids. More than 375 exiting inmates have received these injections since July 2015.

Huntington and Cabell County have made gains targeting substance use disorders and overdoses. Officials such as Cabell County Prosecuting Attorney Sean "Corky" Hammers believe the pilot will further that progress.

"What I hear from the public a lot is, 'Why do these same people get arrested and they keep getting out after they serve their sentence, and they just keep getting arrested again and again?'" Hammers said. "We have tools to prevent that, and this is going to be another useful tool to protect the public and keep offenders from re-offending."

Successful outcomes will also reduce inmate crowding and the burden of incarceration on taxpayers. It costs an estimated \$75.85 a day to keep an inmate in prison, while the State Budget Office has calculated the jail per diem as \$53.20. Corrections and Rehabilitation hopes to expand the pilot throughout the statewide network of 10 regional jails.

"When someone completes this program, we can then quantify the money we can save by cutting off a lot on the tail end of what their sentence could have been," said Secretary Jeff Sandy of the Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety, which includes Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The pilot also promises to improve safety in the jails by reducing demand for drugs and therefore the smuggling of contraband, noted Jack Luikart, DMAPS' director of Corrections Substance Abuse Control. He also cited how more than half of the West Virginians who suffer fatal overdoses had contact with the criminal justice system, such as being in jail, within a year of their deaths.

"This puts them on a good path to recovery while it also would help, hopefully, decrease the number of people who die," said Luikart. "At the same time, it would cut down on our contraband issue because we're treating the addiction."

West Virginia has long offered inpatient Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) in its prisons. It also has RSAT units, one each for men and women, at the Southwestern Regional Jail but for inmates who have been sentenced to prison and await bed space in one.