



## Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

# News

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### **Drug Court Day to honor first 1,000 graduates**

For immediate release

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin; Supreme Court Justice Brent D. Benjamin; and Senate President William P. Cole, III; will join together to honor the first 1,000 graduates of West Virginia adult and juvenile drug courts in a ceremony at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 10, in the lower rotunda of the Capitol.

They each are scheduled to speak, as will First Judicial Circuit (Brooke, Hancock, and Ohio Counties) Judge Martin J. Gaughan and several drug court graduates from around the state.

Adult drug courts from the First Judicial Circuit, Marion County, Mercer County, Randolph County, the South Branch Valley Region, the Southeastern Region, and the West Central Region as well as juvenile drug courts from the First Judicial Circuit, Cabell County, Monongalia County, and Wood County will have information displays about their programs around the lower rotunda that morning.

According to Justice Benjamin, “Drug courts combine intensive judicial supervision, frequent drug testing, counseling, penalties, and incentives to help non-violent offenders with substance abuse problems gain self-responsibility and sobriety and break the cycle of addiction and crime, which is today afflicting so much of West Virginia. Participants find that the program is actually harder than simply serving time.”

Currently, 581 individuals are actively participating in adult and juvenile drug court programs in West Virginia. The savings to West Virginia taxpayers in incarceration costs alone for these participants is approximately \$21 million per year.

“The benefits of this kind of intense treatment program, however, go far beyond the savings to the state,” said Senate President Cole. “These programs save lives, especially the lives of our young people, by intervening early.”

Justice Benjamin agrees. “Without intervention, drug recurrence rates are as high as 80 percent for drug offenders who are simply incarcerated. That rate drops to less than 10 percent for graduates of West Virginia’s adult drug courts, and to less than 14 percent for graduates of West Virginia’s juvenile drug courts. This success is crucial to ending the repeating cycle of drug abuse, victimization and crime in our State.”

Rigorous evaluation and research has demonstrated that, where adult drug courts are implemented consistent with models and procedures developed based on objective studies, they significantly reduce recidivism and substance abuse among high-risk

substance abusing offenders. Properly implemented adult drug courts increase the likelihood of successful rehabilitation while simultaneously reducing the cost to the public below the historic costs of addressing these problems in the criminal justice system.

The goal of juvenile drug courts is to intervene early in the life of a young person and to use the drug court model to prevent future involvement of that young person in the court system.

There currently are twenty-four adult drug court programs serving forty counties and sixteen juvenile drug court programs serving twenty counties.

West Virginia's first adult drug court was established in the Northern Panhandle in 2005 under the leadership of Judge Gaughan and then-First Circuit Chief Probation Officer Jim Lee. The Supreme Court's first juvenile adult court was established in Cabell County in 2007 under the leadership of Sixth Circuit Family Court Patricia A. Keller.

In 2009 and 2011 respectively, the West Virginia Legislature enacted legislation which codified adult and juvenile drug courts in West Virginia under the administration, control and responsibility of the Supreme Court. As part of the Justice Reinvestment Act passed in 2014, adult drug courts will be established in all of West Virginia's counties by July 1, 2016.

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