

Jefferson County wants state funding for jail substance abuse programming

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WATERTOWN — The Jefferson County Board of Legislators wants the state to fund substance abuse services in the county jail to reduce the local recidivism rate of those incarcerated for drug-related offenses.

The board unanimously passed a resolution during its full meeting Tuesday night, formally requesting that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and the state Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services provide the necessary funding, with the goal of starting a new substance abuse program within the jail.

Jefferson County legislators agreed that such a program is necessary, as the opioid epidemic has caused an increased rate of repeated drug offenses, leading offenders to go through the jail multiple times. According to the report conducted by Policy Research Associates on behalf of the state Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Doctors, county sheriffs said that 68 percent of individuals incarcerated on a drug-related charge had previously been jailed for a similar offense.

But officials argue that if more adequate addiction recovery services were provided in-house, that rate could drop.

Roger J. Ambrose, director of Jefferson County Community Services, said that having such a program would make the transition from jail back to normal civilian life much easier.

“That gives them a much better chance of continuing on with recovery,” Mr. Ambrose said.

Currently, the only services provided to inmates convicted of drug-related offenses are evaluations and referrals. Counties are charged with funding their own in-house treatment programs, however extensive, without state aid.

Mr. Ambrose said the county also lacks the resources to keep track of the exact rate of recidivism in the jail.

The resolution notes that 51 percent of jails statewide have no substance-abuse treatment services, and 53 percent do not have the capacity to transition addicted inmates to community treatment programs upon their release.

But many counties, including Jefferson, are calling for \$12.8 million in state funding annually to address this need. Having the money would fund services that include screenings and assessments upon entry, education and counseling services, peer support, medication-assisted treatment and discharge planning to treatment can be continued following a jail sentence.

The resolution cites a state analysis saying it would be cheaper to provide addicts with treatment instead of continually jailing them for repeat offenses. Jail-based substance abuse treatment reportedly could save counties \$2,846 per person, with 13 fewer victimizations per 100 people served (meaning fewer people are victimized by a drug-related offense).

Mr. Ambrose and a few other county officials are traveling to Dutchess County next week to take a look at the substance abuse program that county uses in its jail.

Officials are hoping to see how such a program could work in Jefferson County.

<http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/news03/jefferson-county-wants-state-funding-for-jail-substance-abuse-programming-20180309>