



PUBLIC POLICY & INFORMATION

Promoting Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Through Advocacy and Education

POSITION PAPER **No. 12/213th Legislature** **(2008-09)**

ISSUE:

Lifts ban on Temporary Aid For Needy Families, General Assistance, and food stamps for people with felony drug convictions; addresses related issues affecting reentry.

BILL NO.

S-1347 (Turner, Cunningham, Lesniak)

A-4197 (Watson Coleman, Spencer, Evans, Tucker, Coutinho, Jasey)

NCADD-NJ POSITION:

NCADD-New Jersey strongly supports this measure as it will allow people with a conviction for a crime involving an element of distribution to be eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA), including work activities, medical benefits, food stamps and most importantly the WFNJ Substance Abuse Initiative (SAI).

The addiction problems of people convicted of a distribution crime has important implications for his or her success in the community or reentry. Not allowing them to participate in TANF or GA creates an additional hurdle to the already significant challenges presented of staying crime-free.

SAI is proven to be a successful intensive case management and treatment model to address alcohol and drug addiction and make it possible for individuals to successfully participate in work activities and find work and remain employed.

The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University studied the SAI model and found that compared to women receiving standard care that focused on work first, the women receiving the intensive case management and treat-

ment approach had significantly better results. These include: spending more time and receiving more services from their caseworkers; achieving three times higher rates of initiation, engagement, and retention in outpatient drug or alcohol treatment; achieving significant reductions in drug or alcohol use for women receiving intensive case management and nearly twice the likelihood of being completely abstinent at the 12 and 24 month follow-ups; and being twice as likely to have secured full-time employment at the end of two years.

“These striking outcomes suggest that a long-term care strategy of treatment and abstinence first create the conditions where employment can better be achieved and sustained, even among this seriously disabled population.”ⁱ

Previous CASA research found substantial savings for each unemployed female welfare recipient with an alcohol or drug problem who becomes alcohol- or drug-free and self-supporting. These savings amount to about \$48,000 annually in avoided welfare, health care and criminal justice costs, and contribution to the economy in employment.

Governor Jon Corzine’s initiative called “A Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods” states that “re-entry efforts will focus on providing persons being released from prisons the skills and necessary support and supervision to prevent them from committing new crimes.” S-1347/A-4197 addresses the needs of individuals returning to their community and/or convicted of a distribution charge, enables them to receive treatment, eliminates barriers to reintegration into the community, and relieves impediments to work activities, all of which prevents recidivism.

Lack of alcohol and drug treatment adds to recidivism and a lack of employment for those convicted of distribution crimes. Those who engage in alcohol or drug misuse are at a high risk to recidivate. Eighty-one percent of inmates with five or more prior



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convictions used drugs regularly. A large proportion of individuals convicted of a crime in which one of the elements is distribution or intent to distribute is at risk of reoffending due to both drug-induced behavior and committing such crimes to support their drug habit. Alcohol and drug problems not only increase the chance of reoffending but also hinder the individual's ability to complete job requirements and reestablish relations with family.

The links between drug use and drug distribution activities has long been established. Drug distribution or intent to distribute crimes account for 68 percent of the crimes committed by addicted individuals. Almost all distributors also consume illegal drugs. Most distributors deal drugs primarily to give them access to and money to pay for the drugs they consume. Drug selling and involvement in low-level distribution roles is one type of offending behavior upon which treatment has an immediate and direct impact. One year after treatment, drug selling declines by 78 percent.ⁱⁱ

Scientific research shows that addiction treatment helps many drug using offenders change their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards drug abuse, avoid relapse, and successfully remove themselves from a life of alcohol and drug misuse and crime. Studies show that treatment can cut drug abuse in half, reduce criminal activity up to 80 percent, and reduce arrests up to 64 percent. By addressing the alcohol or drug disorders of inmates returning home, society saves billions of dollars in reduced crime and reduced recidivism, and reclaims thousands of individuals to live as responsible parents, members of the workforce, taxpayers and law-abiding citizens.

About 14,000 inmates are released from prison without the opportunity to participate in treatment and 65 percent of them will be rearrested within five years if they do not receive treatment. In New Jersey, the recidivism rates between people coming out of prison and drug court clients who engage in treat-

ment is very telling. Of those released from prison, within three years 40 percent were reconvicted and 34 percent were re-incarcerated. In contrast, within three years of drug court graduation only 6 percent of New Jersey's Drug Court graduates were reconvicted and only 3 percent were re-incarcerated. In addition, 90 percent were employed at the time of graduation. This bill allows those reentering and those in the community to access drug/alcohol treatment.

Allowing individuals with a distribution conviction to participate in TANF and GA will have a positive social impact. This bill will engage offenders in a program designed to lead them to self-sufficiency. It will also alleviate the high costs associated with re-incarceration and re-offense rates. The WFNJ Program is designed specifically to emphasize personal responsibility, instill dignity, and promote self-sufficiency and pride through work and ensures access to alcohol/drug treatment. Eligibility for WFNJ will prepare offenders to re-enter the workforce, the pivotal factor in avoiding reoffense.

Endnotes

- i) The National Center on addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, Intensive Case Management for Substance Dependent Women
- ii) National Treatment Improvement Evaluation Study

CONTACT

John L. Hulick, MS, CPS
Director of Public Affairs & Policy
609.689.0121
jhulick@ncaddnj.org

360 Corporate Blvd.
Robbinsville, NJ 08691
609.689.0121 (PH) | 609.689.3244 (FX)
POLICY@NCADDNJ.ORG