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SUMMER DAZE

The Dog Days are a good time to reflect upon the work of the first half of the year and to plan activities for the latter part of 2016. This year has already been marked with accomplishments that are building upon the successes of 2015. One of those victories was the passage of an expungement package of bills that became effective on April 19. The major plank was a provision allowing for the automatic erasure of a person's criminal record upon completion of a drug court program. This added incentive is already in place in approximately 250 adult drug courts throughout the nation.

For people who had completed a drug court regimen before this law was passed, they too can apply to expunge their criminal histories. As long as they have had no further convictions or pending charges, their records will also be expunged and their application fee returned to them. The caveat, is that offenses that weren't expungeable before, e.g. murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, etc. still will not be eligible for erasure.

Other notable gains in the last Legislative Term included:

- Measures to establish Recovery High Schools.
- Permit the use of medication-assisted treatment in lock-up facilities and Drug Court.
- Require the N.J. Dept. of Corrections to report on the quality of its drug treatment programs.
- Mandate that treatment providers publicly report outcomes and bed/slot availability.
- Statute compelling certain colleges and universities to establish and maintain recovery residences for their students.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

NCADD-NJ provided testimony on the proposed state Budget in March to a warm reception from legislators in both the Assembly and Senate. We sought more funding for treatment and recovery programs and, indeed, there was additional money allocated in the Budget that was adopted at the end of June for Medicaid reimbursement for behavioral health services, along with an expansion of the Recovery Coach Initiative.

Almost There...

As of this writing, two of the bills that are part of our Road to Recovery Campaign have secured legislative approval and are on the Governor's desk.

S.372/A.2292 would require the Dept. of Education to include age appropriate and evidence-based instruction on addictions in the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

S.384/A.3470 would mandate that jails and prisons provide medications that were prescribed for chronic illnesses prior to incarceration.

All NCADD-NJ supporters are urged to call Gov. Christie's Office (609) 292-6000 and request that he sign those proposals into law.



S.295/A.2334 – Authorizes pharmacists to provide naloxone (Narcan) to patients without an individual prescription – Passed Senate, in Assembly committee

S.383 – Requires that certain physicians working in jails and prisons be sufficiently trained in treating persons with addictions – In committee

A.2619/S.2409 – Mandates that certain prisoners with detainees be provided access to in-prison drug treatment programs – Passed Assembly, in Senate committee

A.3684 – Requires the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services to facilitate the establishment of four new recovery community centers – In committee

A.3744/S.2330 – Establish county and municipal law enforcement assisted addiction and recovery programs – On Governor's desk

**For more information about these bills visit :
www.njleg.state.nj.us**

Looking Ahead



It is anticipated that two new pieces of legislation will be introduced in the Senate and Assembly in the Fall which will enjoy the support of NCADD-NJ.

Senator Joseph Vitale's Office is drafting a proposal to mandate that every high school in the state utilize some form of Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for its students. SBIRT is an oral screening tool to start and encourage a conversation between the youngster and a counselor or nurse. Its intended utilization is with young people who are beginning to exhibit behavioral problems that might be a consequence of misuse of alcohol or drugs. The goal is to retard any early use of illicit substances by establishing a trusting relationship between the student and a caring adult. SBIRT is already in limited use with adults at a number of hospitals and medical centers in the Garden State.



We expect to have Autumn legislation introduced to strengthen and enhance the transparency of the state and federal policies requiring that health benefits coverage for behavioral issues be reimbursed on a par with medical and surgical ailments. A model bill has been drafted by the Kennedy Forum, begun and headed by former Congressman Patrick Kennedy. NCADD-NJ is hosting the NJ Parity Coalition and the Coalition is recruiting certain legislators to be sponsors of the proposal. The measure would, among other things, mandate a public reporting of insurance claims denials and their reasons. It would further improve the mechanisms within the state Dept. of Banking and Insurance to enforce parity compliance. The NJ Parity Coalition consists of people in recovery and their families, service providers, and health care advocates. It has uncovered a wide array of seemingly routine coverage denials and cut-backs that appear in conflict with the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA).