

Marshall County Family Resource Network, Inc.



www.marshallcountyfrn.com

Stacie Dei, Executive Director

324 – 7th Street
Moundsville, WV 26041

Phone: 304-845-3300

Fax: 304-845-3360

E-Mail: marshallcountyfrn@comcast.net

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Contact: Paul J. Gough, 304-845-3300, fnpr@comcast.net

Substance Abuse Costs State's Criminal Justice System \$332 million in 2008

MOUNDSVILLE, WV -- A report released Thursday said that \$332 million of the state's criminal-justice system budget was spent last year on alcohol and drug-related offenses and will rise to \$496 million a year in eight years.

The analysis -- "The Financial Burden of Substance Abuse in West Virginia: The Criminal Justice System" -- was released Thursday by the West Virginia Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being. It's part of the WVPRC's attempts to estimate how much drug and alcohol abuse costs the state annually.

Alcohol- and drug-related expenses cost rose 20% from \$276 million in 2005 to \$332 million in 2008, the WVPRC said. And it's projected to balloon to \$496 million a year by 2017, a jump of 49%. The state's criminal justice system includes the Division of Corrections, Parole Board, Regional Jail Authority, Prosecuting Attorney Office, Public Defender Program and Division of Juvenile Justice; state and municipal police and county sheriffs; and the WV Circuit Court, WV Magistrate Court and Probation Office.

"So many people think that substance abuse doesn't affect them or that it has no impact on their lives. But it does," said Latrisha Whitelatch, substance abuse prevention director of the Marshall County Family Resource Network in Moundsville and acting chair of the Marshall County Anti-Drug Coalition. "Even if they don't have any personal connection to substance abuse, they are paying for it as taxpayers."

The study finds that alcohol and drug abuse are a major problem in West Virginia, with nearly 8% of the state's residents were drug- or alcohol-dependent. It urges that the state can't delay in addressing these problems.

"The state should direct urgent attention at preventing drug and alcohol use at all ages," the study said. "This approach will certainly lessen the financial burden that is facing the criminal justice system and free up resources for other much-needed programs."

Whitelatch said that there should be more investment in prevention.

"If you invest in prevention efforts that the Marshall County Anti-Drug Coalition and other substance abuse prevention coalitions do, it will be effective in the long run," Whitelatch said.

The study is part of the Family Funding Study, funded with federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Block Grant money administered by the West Virginia Division of Criminal Justice. The WV PRC is affiliated with Marshall University and funded primarily through two federal grants: The Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment Block Grant administered through the WV DHHR's Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities and a Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant administered through the WV Governor's Office via its Division of Criminal Justice Services.

You can find the full report at prevnet.org.