



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Justice Benjamin to attend Brooke County graduation

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WELLSBURG, W.Va. – Supreme Court Justice Brent D. Benjamin will attend a ceremony honoring two graduates of treatment programs in the Northern Panhandle at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 27, in the circuit courtroom of the Brooke County Courthouse in Wellsburg.

One person will graduate from the Adult Drug Court Program and one adult will graduate from the Mental Health Court Program.

The Northern Panhandle Mental Health Court diverts non-violent criminal offenders who have been diagnosed with an AXIS I mental illness away from the criminal justice system and into treatment. Offenders are professionally evaluated by a certified psychologist before being accepted into the program. If accepted, clients must attend assigned treatment and abstain from criminal behavior. They are closely supervised in the community by a treatment team that is dedicated to improving their social functioning and decreasing their contact with the criminal justice system. This program was the first treatment court in West Virginia and remains the only Mental Health Court in the state.

West Virginia has a growing network of drug courts, which are intensive supervision probation programs.

Adult drug courts include those who already are addicted. Participants complete a treatment program of no less than twelve months. They are required to attend group and individual counseling, to take drug tests multiple times per week, to perform community service work, to participate in education programs, and to work on individualized rehabilitation plans as directed. They meet with probation officers frequently and see the drug court judge at least weekly.

The average annual cost incurred by the state for one adult drug court participant is approximately \$7,100 compared to \$18,000 in jail or \$25,000 in prison. About 10 percent of drug court graduates return to jail compared to 80 percent of drug offenders who have not gone through drug court programs.

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