



Grant to help Ind. county community corrections program grow

Caseloads for felony probation and community corrections are expected to increase by at least 200 additional cases per year

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — More than \$600,000 in grant funding this year from the Indiana Department of Correction continues to help the county's community corrections program grow.

Circuit Court Judge Marc Kellams said the increased revenue for community corrections is a result of changes the state Legislature made to the Indiana Criminal Code.

"It is the expectation of the Indiana General Assembly that these Level 6 felons will now be dealt with at the local level through probation supervision and community corrections programs," said Linda Brady, the county's chief probation officer.

As a result, caseloads for felony probation and community corrections are expected to increase by at least 200 additional cases per year. Right now, the department handles about 480 cases per year.

To help community corrections and probation departments handle the anticipated influx, Brady said, the General Assembly increased grant funding by \$5 million in 2016 and plans an additional \$20 million for 2017.

State Rep. Matt Pierce, D-Bloomington, said after a five-year study of the Indiana Criminal Code to better utilize the dollars already set aside for corrections, the focus

became making more funding available for local programs such as community corrections.

The study revealed that diverting felons who qualify to alternative sentencing programs can lead to fewer repeat offenders and provides the opportunity to treat the core reasons some of the low-level felons commit crimes in the first place, such as addiction and mental health problems, Pierce said.

"It gives you an opportunity to break that cycle," Pierce said.

There was concern that all the Legislature was doing when it instituted the changes to the criminal code was redirecting offenders from state prisons to local ones. Pierce said that was not the intent and will only create a host of new problems.

Instead, the Legislature is using the additional funding as leverage to have all counties develop alternative sentencing programs for low-level nonviolent felons, he said.

"Monroe County is a model for the entire state when it comes to implementing these programs," Pierce said.

According to a county newsrelease last week, \$369,000 will help fund the salaries and fringe benefits of six positions, two community corrections field officers and four probation officers. The field officers will supervise offenders serving at-home detention who are participants in a problem solving court program.

Two probation officers will supervise moderate- to high-risk felons, another will work to expand the number of offenders eligible to be a part of the problem solving court program and the other will be in a supervisory role working toward improving departmental evidence-based correctional practices.

The county also will use \$169,600 to help expand its Community Alternative Supervision Program, which uses various forms of home detention, electronic monitoring and work release as alternatives to sentencing, pretrial and sanctions. Another \$63,600 will be used to purchase two fleet vehicles and office equipment.

But whether grants will continue to pay for staffing increases to handle increased felony caseloads beyond 2017 is yet to be seen.

Pierce said the next budget session needs to at least maintain the money allocated if not increase it.

"This overall \$25 million increase is unprecedented; therefore, it remains to be seen if the IGA continues to fund local correctional options at this same level during the next state budget cycle," Brady said. "We certainly are planning that at the very least the grants that pay for staffing increases will continue in future years."

While the increased staff is welcomed, it could be a challenge to find space for the new employees to do their jobs.

The existing probation department is split between the Curry Building and the Community Corrections building, and Brady said neither of the department's current locations has sufficient open offices.

"In the short term, while the new probation officers are in training, we can survive without this space, but eventually, in order to appropriately perform our required job functions, all five of the probation officers will need office space," Brady said.

Kellams said the court is working with the county commissioners to provide additional space. He added there will be some increased costs due to space requirements, but he said by expanding the community corrections services, thus keeping the jail population under control, the county will save money.

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