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Wisconsin wins two major federal grants to reduce crime

Madison, Wis. (Aug. 10, 2011) – Two Wisconsin communities have been selected in a national competition to receive federal grants that will provide technical assistance for an 18-month initiative to hold offenders accountable, reduce the overall crime rate and recidivism, and give taxpayers a better return on the dollars they invest in criminal justice.

Eau Claire and Milwaukee – the only Wisconsin communities participating in the grant competition – were chosen from among seven finalists for the two federal grants.

“That both Eau Claire and Milwaukee counties were chosen for these awards is reflective of what they have been able to accomplish, which not many other jurisdictions across the United States have achieved,” said Lori Eville, the Bureau of Prisons specialist who manages the grant

program and who participated in the five-person panel that awarded the grants. “Wisconsin can be very, very proud. What is being done there will be taught across the nation.”

The grants come from the Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems Initiative, which is funded by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) with support from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs. Also awarded a grant was Grand Junction, Colo. The other competitors were Charlottesville, Va.; Marion, Ind. (near Fort Wayne); St. Paul, Minn.; and Yamhill County, Ore. (near Portland).

Each of the seven communities received an initial grant in fall 2010 to develop a plan for improving the criminal justice system. Eau Claire and Milwaukee now will receive federal technical assistance to put their plans into action. The projects will examine every step in the criminal justice process, asking: why do we do the things we do? Are they effective? How do we know? Practices that do not stand up to scrutiny will be swapped for practices that have been proven successful. These are called evidence-based practices.

“It is absolutely remarkable that Wisconsin won both of these important federal grants,” said Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson. “This recognition underscores our reputation as a national leader in the effort to apply cutting-edge research to the difficult task of reducing crime and stopping the revolving door that leads too many offenders back to prison again and again. We will be the laboratory where best practices are developed, fine-tuned and shared with jurisdictions across the nation.”

Judges who are working on the projects were excited by the news that both Wisconsin communities won the grants.

“Milwaukee devoted many hours to developing a detailed analysis and plan, and I am delighted that the NIC recognized our commitment to getting smart on crime,” said Judge Richard J. Sankovitz, who is helping to lead the initiative.

District One Chief Judge Jeffrey Kremers, Milwaukee County Circuit Court, said the one-year planning period showed participants what is possible. “We have already seen that an enormous difference can be made when a community implements a rigorous, highly collaborative program to target the underlying causes of crime,” he said. “We tend to assume that we know that what we are doing at any given time is the most cost-effective way to do it. This new program forces us to prove it, and if the evidence shows that it isn’t working, or that there is a better way to work it, then we change.”

Judge Michael A. Schumacher, Eau Claire County Circuit Court, is helping to lead the Eau Claire effort. “The Eau Claire County Evidence Based Decision Making Policy Team has been immersed in this challenging and rewarding initiative for the past ten months,” he said. “Much time and energy has been invested in understanding evidence-based decision making (EBDM), examining our current practices and identifying areas for change.”

District Ten Chief Judge Scott R. Needham, St. Croix County Circuit Court, oversees the management of the courts in Eau Claire County. He emphasized that much of the credit for Eau Claire's successful grant application goes to Schumacher and Eau Claire District Atty. Richard White, along with Criminal Justice Collaborating Council Coordinator Tiana Glenna. Needham also praised the efforts of retired Chief Judge Benjamin D. Proctor.

“Chief Judge Proctor understood years ago that to improve the criminal justice system we must ensure that all the diverse entities that have a role in the process are speaking with one another on a regular basis,” Needham said. “He helped to start the Eau Claire Criminal Justice Collaborating Council, and that’s the group that has identified needed improvements and brought energy and commitment to this enormous undertaking. The Eau Claire County judges and EBDM team should take great pride in the work they have done and the opportunity they now have to continue the process of improving the criminal justice system.”

The Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) teams that developed the grant applications and that will continue to spearhead these efforts are:

Eau Claire: Eau Claire County Circuit Court Judges Lisa K. Stark, Michael A. Schumacher and William M. Gabler; Reserve Judge Thomas H. Barland; Clerk of Circuit Court Kristina Aschenbrenner; Kellie Blechinger, Department of Corrections (DOC); Captain Dan Bresina, undersheriff; Michael Felton, DOC; Criminal Justice Collaborating Council Coordinator Tiana Glenna; Becky Gunderson, budget analyst, Eau Claire County Finance Department; Dave Hayden, director of information services; Gena Jarr, DOC; District 10 Court Administrator Scott K. Johnson; Eau Claire Chief of Police Jerry Matysik; Assistant City Atty. Lucie McGee; Eau Claire County Board Chair Gregg Moore; Francie Peardon, community representative; Eau Claire Director of Human Services Roy Seargent; Atty. Dana Smetana, assistant state public defender; and Eau Claire District Atty. Richard White.

Milwaukee: Chief Judge Jeffrey Kremers and Judge Richard J. Sankovitz; Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr.; District Atty. John Chisholm; Police Chief Ed Flynn; Mayor Tom Barrett; County Executive Chris Abele; Roberta Gaither, regional chief in the Department of Corrections Division of Community Corrections; Rob Henken, president, Public Policy Forum; Jim Hiller, Milwaukee County Community Justice Council Coordinator; County Board Sup. Willie Johnson Jr.; Kit McNally, retired executive director, Benedict Center; Atty. Tom Reed, first assistant state public defender; Nick Sayner, director of Justice 2000 Pretrial Services; Deputy District Atty. Jeffrey Altenburg; Atty. Paige Styler, assistant state public defender; and Holly Szablewski, Milwaukee judicial review coordinator; and Paulina de Haan, regional coordinator, City of Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention.

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