



## Administrative Office of the Courts

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*For Immediate Release*

### Justices, judges participate in Kentucky Opioid Summit in Louisville Chief Justice Minton hosts court system's first event on opioid epidemic for state's judicial officials

FRANKFORT, Ky., Jan. 27, 2017 – Justices and judges from across Kentucky recently joined the statewide discussion on the escalating opioid epidemic at the court system's first-ever summit on this crisis. Chief Justice of Kentucky John D. Minton Jr. hosted the Kentucky Opioid Summit for the state's justices and judges Jan. 25 in Louisville. The summit was attended by 168 Supreme Court justices and Court of Appeals, Circuit Court, Family Court and District Court judges.

"One of the most serious challenges facing Kentucky is the opioid epidemic, which is destroying lives, devastating families and increasing drug-related cases in the courts," Chief Justice Minton said. "The court system has a significant role to play in meeting the legal demands and human needs of this crisis. I called this summit because we must gain a better understanding of addiction and treatment so we can make informed decisions from the bench and develop a plan to work with other agencies."

Chief Justice Minton began working on a Kentucky-specific summit after attending the first Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative in August 2016. The Supreme Court of Ohio hosted that event for surrounding states heavily affected by the opioid epidemic: Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The goal of the regional event was to create a framework to coordinate the efforts of state and federal policymakers to combat the opioid epidemic.

"The opioid epidemic is one of the most serious public health and safety issues facing Kentucky today and judges must know how to handle these drug-related cases appropriately," Chief Justice Minton said.

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The Kentucky Opioid Summit covered case law, statutes and Americans with Disabilities Act regulations regarding medication-assisted treatment. It also focused on the science of treating addiction and government's role in combating the opioid epidemic. Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin and powerful pain relievers, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone. Kentucky is one of the top five states in opioid overdose deaths per capita, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Medication-assisted treatment involves providing medications to opioid addicts to ease withdrawal systems and reduce cravings. The justices and judges heard about the law, liability and ethics of medication-assisted treatment from attorney Douglas L. McSwain of Wyatt Tarrant & Combs. Dr. Joshua Lee of the New York University of Medicine provided a session on the neuroscience of medication-assisted treatment.

One way the Kentucky court system addresses substance use disorder is through Kentucky Drug Court. Drug Court programs in 16 counties are now using medication-assisted treatment to help some participants with opioid addiction.

Justices and judges participated in two panel presentations as part of the event. In a panel session on opioid use disorder and the criminal justice system, discussions were about criminal justice and legislative efforts to address the epidemic, the science of treating someone with an opioid use disorder, the history of the opioid epidemic and current crime trends related to opioid use. Panelists were Chief Justice Minton, Secretary John Tilley of the state Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, Executive Director Van Ingram of the state Office of Drug Control Policy, Louisville Metro Police Chief Steve Conrad, and Dr. Michelle R. Lofwall, a medical doctor who is an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral science with the University of Kentucky's Center on Drug and Alcohol Research.

The second panel focused on state government's role in dealing with the growing opioid problem. The session included a presentation on the state's comprehensive plan to reduce overdose-related deaths by Adam M. Meier, Gov. Matt Bevin's deputy chief of staff and health policy advisor. Panelists also covered the scope of the epidemic, the impact on children and families, evidence-based treatment, and KASPER's part in addressing prescription drug use disorder. KASPER is Kentucky's prescription drug monitoring program.

The panel also discussed strategies for reducing the issues resulting from opioid use, such as offering syringe exchange programs and Naloxone, which is a medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration to prevent opioid overdose. In addition to Meier, panelists were Deputy Secretary and former judge Timothy Feeley of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Commissioner Dr. Hiram C. Polk of the Department of Public Health, KASPER program manager David R. Hopkins and Dr. Allen J. Brenzel, medical director for the state Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities.

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The Division of Judicial Branch Education at the Administrative Office of the Courts provided the summit.

### **Administrative Office of the Courts**

The [AOC](#) is the operations arm for the state court system and supports the activities of nearly 3,400 court system employees and 404 elected justices, judges and circuit court clerks. As the fiscal agent for the state court system, the AOC also executes the Judicial Branch budget.

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