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County gives OK to youth drug court

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Published: Tuesday, March 3, 2009 12:13 PM CST

Judge Kevin Adams is looking to start a juvenile drug court in Leflore County.

Instead of simply sentencing narcotics offenders younger than 18 to the detention center, Adams would have the option of putting them in a one-year program of therapy that balances rewards for good deeds with punishments for misdeeds.

The Board of Supervisors gave the judge their approval Monday to apply to the state for funding. The county would pay the costs of the program and then be reimbursed in full by the Administrative Office of Courts.

"It would just flow through the county each month," Adams said.

Next year, the county would receive about \$237,000, which would treat 40 kids.

Youth court would team with Life Help to provide three phases of treatment: one-on-one, group and in-home therapy. The in-home portion would include the juveniles and their families.

"It's really a lot more than I had hoped for when I first asked them to join in," Adams said. "There will also be an educational component, and we will partner with Mississippi Valley State University to provide tutors."

One of the biggest benefits, according to Adams, is the drug crime would be expunged from the juvenile's record after completion of the program.

Even though they're generally sealed, youth records still can cost offenders later. For example, Adams signed an order Monday releasing the juvenile records of a 36-year-old to a court considering sentencing him for another crime.

The programs wouldn't apply to youth from the other nine counties that have contracts to use Leflore County's juvenile detention center.

Supervisors also approved hiring a program coordinator, who would also serve as law clerk for youth and county courts. The employee's salary would be paid by a \$34,700 grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and money from the youth court budget.

Adams said he had someone in mind for the position but did not want to identify the person publicly yet. He intends to hire someone with a law degree.

The program coordinator would seek grants that would pay his or her salary in future years.

"I would anticipate that job always funding itself," Adams said.



Judge Kevin Adams spoke to Leflore County supervisors Monday regarding a new youth drug court. The board gave Adams approval to apply for state funding to get the program off the ground. Photo by Charlie Smith.

Supervisors also approved for youth court to apply for a juvenile accountability block grant from the state for \$30,000. Adams intends to spend \$17,000 to \$20,000 of it on a computerized booking and billing system.

The county would pay a \$3,333 match on the grant.

Also Monday:

- Supervisors authorized Joyce Chiles, board attorney, to negotiate with the Mid Delta Community and Individual Investment Corp. on changes they want made to their agreement with the county on a \$5 million loan program for minority-owned businesses. The vote was 3-2, with Phil Wolfe and Preston Ratliff against.

Supervisor Robert Moore said part of the agreement must be that MDCIIC agrees to maintain an office here.

- The board granted permission to the East Leflore Sewer and Water District to extend service to several new areas, including Chapman subdivision, homes behind what was once the Blue Room and Viking Range's facility on U.S. 82 W.

Moore said the efforts had been in the works since 2001 and called it an example of the county working diligently to get something done.

- The board approved a plat for a new subdivision, Lake Henry Estates, being developed by Itta Bena farmer Walter Pennebaker. It includes 19 lots, but Pennebaker said at most eight to 10 homes would be built. It is to be in northwest Leflore County behind Mississippi Valley State University.
- After a lengthy discussion, supervisors delayed voting on a request by District 3 Supervisor Preston Ratliff to buy about \$13,000 worth of playground equipment for the Schlater park. They will consider his requests and needs other supervisors identify for parks in their districts at a special meeting Thursday at 10 a.m.

Ratliff had accused the county of "squandering" money on projects that don't provide any benefit to citizens but rejecting him whenever he tried to help people. That spurred quick rebuttals from Board President Wayne Self and County Administrator Sam Abraham.

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