

HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY MAYOR
WESTON WAMP

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**Hamilton County Aggressively Taking Action to Combat Opioid Epidemic
with Incoming Settlement Dollars from the State**

*County Mayor, Sheriff, and District Attorney launch a series of initiatives focused on prevention,
rehabilitation, and holding lethal drug dealers accountable*

Hamilton County Mayor Weston Wamp, alongside Hamilton County Sheriff Austin Garrett and Hamilton County District Attorney General Coty Wamp, today announced the county's initial plans regarding the use of Opioid Abatement Settlement Funds to fight the deadly opioid epidemic. Hamilton County is set to receive millions of dollars over the next 18 years based on the funding formula from the State of Tennessee, and the county will soon apply for additional funding from the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council.

“With millions of dollars coming to Hamilton County over the next couple of decades, we have a moral and ethical obligation to be as aggressive and creative as possible in combating the crisis of opioid abuse across Hamilton County,” said **Mayor Wamp**. “I want Hamilton County to be the worst place in America to sell fentanyl and other deadly drugs. County government will lead the charge, partnered with local nonprofits, to support prevention, rehabilitation, and law enforcement efforts aimed at deterring drug dealers in our community.”

The key initiatives include:

Chief Opioid Prosecutor

In this year's budget, Mayor Wamp allocated unrestricted opioid abatement funds to the District Attorney's office to hire a prosecutor whose mandated mission is holding accountable dealers of deadly drugs. General Wamp has hired Jamie Pulido as the county's first Chief Opioid Prosecutor, focusing on the highest level drug dealers who can now be prosecuted under the new 2nd Degree Murder statute. Pulido works closely with narcotics investigators in local and federal law enforcement agencies.

“Statistics have shown us that our most dangerous criminal offenders are drug dealers. They're killing roughly six times more people in our county every year than what we typically think of as violent criminals,” said **General Wamp**. “When considering how my office could best tackle these offenders, I realized that a dedicated prosecutor whose sole focus is sending drug dealers to prison is the way in which we can guarantee results.

I committed to prioritizing dangerous criminals and this position is representative of not only my office's priorities, but also the county as a whole. Thank you to the Mayor and County Commission for providing Hamilton County with its first ever Opioid Prosecutor.”

Expanding the Re-entry Program at the Jail

Mayor Wamp has set aside \$250,000 in restricted opioid abatement dollars to expand the re-entry program at the Hamilton County Jail and Detention Center. The county has additionally transferred a facility from the Highway Department, in close proximity to the jail, to house some of the programs. When the expansion is complete, cosmetology, electrical, welding, and carpentry programs will be up and running with participants enrolled in programming as early as September.

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program

Hamilton County will spend restricted opioid abatement settlement dollars to launch a Medication-Assisted Treatment pilot program for inmates at the jail. This initiative will serve individuals who suffer with substance misuse and provide medical assistance in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies. The goal is to expand the continuum of care for participants to include those who are incarcerated and transition these individuals into recovery courts or other organizations who provide long-term services. Intervening early will hopefully in return reduce recidivism and crowding in the jail, and prepare inmates to reintegrate into their neighborhoods and contribute to our community upon their release.

“The HCSO is proud to partner with County Mayor Wamp to use state opioid abatement funding to support the medical and occupational needs of the inmates in the Hamilton County Jail and Detention Center. This funding will be used to create a new Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program for inmates who suffer from substance abuse and expand our Re-Entry Program to include welding training and funds to upgrade an existing facility workspace. Our goal here is clear... We want to help inmates receive the services and occupational training necessary to reduce recidivism, earn a livable wage, and experience a productive life upon release and this funding will allow us this opportunity,” stated **Sheriff Austin Garrett**.

Social Counselor at the Hamilton County Health Department

In this year’s budget, Mayor Wamp included restricted opioid abatement dollars to fund a new position in the Hamilton County Health Department to serve as a social counselor in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program. Acknowledging the pivotal role of parents as their child’s primary educator, this professional will visit homes in which the parents suffer from addiction and dependency. By offering support services, this individual will help families engage with each other in positive and healthy ways.

Overdose Alert System

Leaders in Hamilton County government are devising a strategic communications plan to notify the public when there is a spike in overdoses in our community. The County Mayor’s office will work in conjunction with the Medical Examiner’s office, Emergency Services, and the Health Department to distribute information in a timely manner, so friends and families of users are aware of the dangerous drugs infiltrating our streets.

Community Response Grant for Opioid Abatement Funds

Mayor Wamp has earmarked \$500,000 in grant funds available for application by local organizations. This will allow for direct distribution of settlement resources into the communities and organizations most directly impacted by the opioid crisis and who are deploying grassroots strategies to combat its destructive impact on local families. The mayor’s office will work with county commissioners to identify organizations in need of support and take applications to the commission for their approval of funding.

Community Support

The initiatives proposed have been informed by the expertise and input from the Opioid Abatement Working Group, a county-convened group comprised of public and private organizational partners of government, who meet regularly to discuss meaningful solutions in fighting the opioid epidemic.

“The McNabb Center is impressed by the County’s thorough assessment of the community needs, resources and gaps. The use of existing data from first responders, emergency rooms and medical providers, as well as community members impacted by opioid use within their families, has led this working group to create a continuum of care focused on prevention, treatment and long-term recovery. It’s exciting to be a part of the collaborative efforts among numerous organizations and community partners—all genuinely committed to reducing the number of lives negatively impacted and lost from opioid use,” said Gayle Lodato, member of the working group and Regional Vice President of the Helen Ross McNabb Center.

“The incorporation of Recovery Navigators in Erlanger’s Emergency Department has drastically improved our ability to provide individualized care to our community members experiencing a substance abuse related crisis. Partnering with the County has allowed us to foster relationships with multiple organizations to not just treat the immediate issue, but provide holistic care by directly connecting patients to resources outside the ER,” said Jessica Long, member of the working group and Behavioral Health Manager at Erlanger.

Local parent advocates have voiced their support for these initiatives:

“Awareness is moving in a positive direction. It is comforting to know that we have public officials who care about the devastating effects of fentanyl poisoning. With a D.A. and Mayor working together to create positions dedicated to eradicating this plague, we are beginning to at least create awareness – if we are not yet stemming the tide. We also have an army of families willing to help in any way so that other families never feel this grief and helplessness,” said Connie Delashmitt Brooks, a parent representative from Moms for Overdose Loss.

“This last year has been a whirlwind as my daughter passed away in October 2022. I have learned so much about this horrible epidemic – opioid addiction and deaths. Since her death, I have been honored to be a part of a group of moms who have all walked the same walk – without that support, I cannot imagine what I would be doing. I am so pleased with the progress Hamilton County has made with this crisis ensuring that people are aware and have resources in our area for help. I am dedicated to continue to push for more awareness and resources for everyone,” said Wendi Black, another parent representative from Moms for Overdose Loss.

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