



# BCPO News

**Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor**



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## **“Operation Helping Hand” Expands into Municipal Court** *Defendants with offenses related to drug use will be offered treatment services*

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that the Burlington County Operation Helping Hand program has expanded services into the municipal court that serves Burlington City and Burlington Township, with outreach and treatment options being offered to those arrested on nonviolent offenses related to their drug use.

In partnership with the Burlington Township Police Department, the City of Burlington Police Department, and Solstice Counseling and Wellness Center (“Solstice”), the County Prosecutor’s Municipal Court Diversion Initiative (MCDI) seeks to provide intervention to those arrested for drug-related disorderly persons offenses or petty disorderly persons offenses by presenting the opportunity to enter treatment and have their court matter adjourned for a period of time.

At the successful conclusion of treatment, the defendant will return to court to face the charges, hopefully on the path to recovery so that the municipal prosecutor and municipal judge can consider their progress when determining the appropriate disposition or sentence in the case.

“We will continue to explore different options to provide support and assistance to people struggling with addiction,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “Being arrested puts one at a crossroads, and through the MCDI, we will present the opportunity for a person struggling with substance use to start down the road to recovery. We cannot relent in this effort if we hope to conquer this horrific opioid epidemic, which continues to destroy so many lives.”

Prosecutor Coffina emphasized that the MCDI is not a get-out-of-jail-free card, and enrolling in a treatment program is no guarantee that the charges will be dropped or reduced. However, the municipal prosecutor and judge will give consideration to program participants who make a good-faith effort to pursue treatment, participate in counseling and embrace the recovery process. Assessments, referrals to an appropriate treatment program for each participant, and assistance with aftercare will be provided by Solstice.

The MCDI program is focused specifically on defendants charged with nonviolent offenses in municipal court. Eligible defendants must be referred by a police officer from the City of Burlington or Burlington Township police departments, or by the municipal prosecutor who prosecutes cases in the joint municipal court.

“We are grateful to Burlington County Assignment Judge Jeanne T. Covert, Municipal Court Presiding Judge Dennis McInerney, Municipal Prosecutor Dan Gee, Burlington Township Public Safety Director Bruce Painter, and City of Burlington Police Chief John Fine for their enthusiastic support of this initiative,” Prosecutor Coffina added. “We look forward to working with them and their agencies to offer help to people whose offenses are driven by addiction rather than malice, while still holding them accountable for their actions.”

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This is the third round of Operation Helping Hand that has been launched in Burlington County by the Prosecutor's Office. During May and August last year, recovery specialists responded to calls around the clock from local police officers to offer support and access to treatment to individuals soon after they had been revived with naloxone following an overdose, were arrested or were simply struggling with addiction.

The pilot MCDI is expected to run through at least August 2020. In addition, this month the Prosecutor's Office and law enforcement agencies throughout Burlington County are again making recovery specialists available on a 24/7 basis to anyone they believe could benefit from substance abuse treatment or counseling. This initiative, in partnership with the nonprofit City of Angels, will run throughout the month of February, and be reprised in May and July 2020.

Last year, City of Angels recovery specialists had a greater than 80% success rate in having people agree to recovery coaching, and ultimately, over 33% of the people with whom this connection was made went into treatment.

Operation Helping Hand is a law enforcement-initiated outreach program funded through grants from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and administered by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. The Prosecutor's current Operation Helping Hand program also includes recovery coach training (see [here](#) for more information), a veteran's initiative, and support for the Burlington County Sheriff's Department's Hope One mobile outreach program and the County's forthcoming recovery resource center, which is expected to open in the summer.

Operation Helping Hand is one of three BCPO initiatives aimed at combatting the opioid epidemic.

Operation Safe Overnight, which began in November 2018, focuses on saving lives and increasing enforcement activity at hotels and motels that have experienced overdoses and drug-related criminal activity. Through this program, with the support of Virtua Health, the BCPO has provided Narcan to county hotels and has also trained hotel employees how to use it to reverse an overdose and save a person's life.

Straight ... to Treatment is a program that allows people to walk off the street and into police stations in three municipalities to seek treatment for drug addiction, regardless of whether they are insured or live in Burlington County.

The Straight ... to Treatment program began in Evesham Township in early 2018, expanded to Pemberton Township in September 2018, and to the City of Burlington in April 2019. It has helped connect over 200 people to treatment so far.

### **Straight ... to Treatment Locations and Hours of Operation**

Evesham Twp. Police Department, 984 Tuckerton Road, Evesham Township  
Mondays: noon – 7 p.m.

Pemberton Twp. Police Department, 500 Pemberton-Browns Mills Road, Pemberton Twp.  
Tuesdays: noon – 6 p.m.

City of Burlington Police Department, 525 High Street, City of Burlington  
Wednesdays and Thursdays: noon – 6 p.m.

<https://burlpros.org/community-outreach/opioid-treatment/>

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