



Bronx Opioid Court Gives Participants a Chance at Recovery

By [Victoria Kim](#) 02/02/18

Once a participant completes their treatment program, their case is dismissed and sealed, according to the Law Journal.



A new program run by the Bronx Criminal Court in New York City is hoping to prioritize recovery for people charged with low-level, non-violent offenses. The Bronx's Overdose Avoidance and Recovery (OAR) program is just over two months old, but has so far helped 50 defendants access treatment in lieu of jail, according to the [New York Law Journal](#).

"It's not being soft on crime; it's being smart on crime because these people will continue to go through the system because of their problem," said Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark, according to [Fox 5](#). "If you don't address the problem, you're going to continue to have the crime. If we address the problem, I believe we will reduce the crime."

This is the second opioid court in New York state. The first was established in Buffalo last May. That program has counted 230 participants so far, with one drug-related death.

Buffalo's opioid court was created out of a need to address the growing rate of fatal opioid overdose in the city. Health officials recorded a significant increase in a two-year span—from 127 opioid-related deaths in 2014 to 300 in 2016. Erie County District Attorney John Flynn called it “an epidemic.” He said, “We lose a life, on average, every day because of this problem.”

The Bronx has also struggled to address its growing opioid problem. The New York Times reported that more Bronx residents died of a drug overdose in 2016 than any other borough, including Staten Island. Among those deaths, 85% involved opioids; 76% involved heroin and fentanyl specifically.

The *New York Law Journal* was able to witness the OAR in action with Judge George Grasso. Each participant is reviewed individually, and a representative from Bronx Community Solutions was present to offer treatment options that work for each person's situation.

District Attorney Clark explained that the program is open to anyone who has been arrested for a non-violent, minor offense, and has a drug problem. Grasso said, “We will in this proceeding bend over backwards to work with you.” And once a participant completes their treatment program, their case is dismissed and sealed, according to the *Law Journal*.

“OAR is not about crime and punishment, but about compassion and recovery,” said Judge Grasso, who is also the supervising judge for Bronx Criminal Court.

Link: <https://www.thefix.com/bronx-opioid-court-gives-participants-chance-recovery>