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Program to counsel inmates on drugs \$350,000 from state to pay for program on jobs, behavior

There is a yo-yo effect that plagues state and county prison systems – the majority of inmates return to prison for parole violations or crimes after they are released.

The cycle contributes to prison overcrowding, forces institutions to house nonviolent criminals with the violent and costs taxpayers money, said Susan McNaughton, press secretary for the state Department of Corrections. "What's driving this behavior is usually substance abuse," she said. The state has asked Dauphin and York counties to accept grant money to finance programs that will provide drug and alcohol treatment to nonviolent criminals, along with other services.

The Dauphin County commissioners this week accepted the offer of \$356,247 to build a program that will offer substance abuse treatments, job placement assistance and family counseling to ex-inmates from the county or state prison system who plan to live in Dauphin County.

The money will be used by the county's adult probation office and the faithbased group Firm Foundation to develop programs that will help former inmates break the chain of behavior that lands them back in jail, said Steve Liphart, criminal justice administrator for the county. Addressing substance-abuse problems could have a significant impact on reducing the number of people who return to prison, said the Rev. Ron Tilley, executive director of Firm Foundation. Firm Foundation helps former inmates make the transition from prison to a successful life in the community.

Some 75 percent of ex-prisoners have a history of substance abuse, he said. It costs taxpayers about \$32,000 a year to house an inmate in a state prison, McNaughton said. Tilley, citing a study from 1997, estimated that the social cost -- lost taxes on wages, court costs, food stamps and welfare benefits for family left behind -- could total \$30,000 in addition to the cost of housing a prisoner. "If you get a prisoner back on their feet, they get to be a productive citizen and be a taxpayer," he said. Tilley estimated the program could serve up to 70 people a year.

Commissioners asked for quarterly reports on its progress. Tilley said the Capital Region Ex-offender Support Coalition, which has more than 26

members, has agreed to hire and pay for a full-time coordinator for the program.

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<http://www.firmfoundation.org/DCRSAT-Patriot-News-2007-07-30.pdf>

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