



Powered by Clickability

## Boozman introduces drug courts bill

Wednesday, Sep 14, 2005

**By Alison Vekshin**

**Stephens Washington Bureau**

WASHINGTON -- Rep. John Boozman, R-Rogers, on Tuesday introduced legislation aimed at strengthening the powers of local drug courts.

The bill directs the U.S. attorney general to create standard guidelines for drug testing and require penalties or therapy if an offender fails a test.

"Currently, we have drug courts that are exceptional," Boozman said. "We have drug courts that aren't working very well at all because there is no structure."

The bill calls on the attorney general to set standards that require each offender to be tested for every controlled or addictive substance.

Arkansas' 38 drug courts routinely test offenders for marijuana, alcohol, methamphetamine and crack cocaine, said Rhonda Sharp, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Community Correction.

The bill also provides incentives for drug courts to educate students and the community regarding the nation's drug problem, including methamphetamine.

Boozman said the idea was sparked by Circuit Court Judge Mary Ann Gunn, who runs the Washington and Madison County Drug Court and has a practice of holding court at local schools.

"It's a deterrent and a great educational tool," Boozman said.

Drug courts provide an alternative to incarceration for those convicted on alcohol- or drug-related charges, or crimes committed under the influence of a controlled substance. Drug courts can be located in a parole office, an outpatient clinic or in other locations.

Participants are required to undergo drug screenings, be employed or enrolled in school and take part in a 12-step program or other self-help group.

"We believe the system we have works, but that's not to say it's perfect," Sharp said.

The state's 1,205 offenders are tested at random and as often as several times per week, she added.

"Every time you get a pattern of testing, then drug offenders will pattern their use on that," she said. "They are less likely to fall back on old habits of using drugs if they don't know when they are going to be tested."

Drug courts are eligible for federal aid through the Justice Department's Drug Courts Grant Program. President Bush has requested \$70 million for the program in his fiscal 2006 budget.

The bill has one co-sponsor, Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., who is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources.

-- 30 --

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.arkansasnews.com/archive/2005/09/14/WashingtonDCBureau/328283.html>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.