

Drug Policy Reform

The King County Bar Association (KCBA) is a partnership of lawyers, doctors, pharmacists and other professionals who are searching for more effective ways to reduce the harm and costs of drug abuse, by reforming drug policy. This partnership began in 2000, when an editorial discussing the failure of the “War on Drugs” sparked interest among lawyers, judges, public health officials, and scholars which led to a cooperative examination of current drug policy.

Following this examination, the King County Bar Association, “concluded that, rather than criminally punish persons for drug use per se, any state sanction or remedy should be aimed at reducing the harm directly caused to others by persons using drugs.¹” This initiative led to the drug sentencing bill of 2002, enacted by the Washington State Legislature, which put in place a new drug sentencing system “that gives sentencing courts vastly increased discretion to reduce incarceration and focuses much more on treatment alternatives for drug law violators.²” Current initiatives of the KCBA have branched out over the following areas: legal reform, drug prevention, drug treatment, and racial and class disparities, in an effort to further reform drug policy.

The legal reform is the core effort of the KCBA Drug Policy Project and is organized in the Legal Frameworks Group which is composed of lawyers, doctors, clinicians, scholars, public officials, and law enforcement. The working principle of this group is that “the degree of state control over a particular substance should be commensurate with the known potential for primary harm and for problematic use associated with the substance.³”

Drug prevention is an issue which is addressed in the KCBA’s Drug Abuse Prevention/Drug Education Working Group which is composed of predominantly substance abuse experts. The function of this group is to “evaluate opportunities and obstacles to the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs in schools, working towards recommending improvements in the state’s prevention and drug education strategies to focus on programs for high-risk youth and greater use of harm reduction measures.⁴”

The issues surrounding drug treatment are addressed by four groups, which are, the Treatments Policy and Funding Task Force, Opiate Substitution Working Group, Insurance Working Group, and the Juvenile Treatment Working Group. These groups are involved with issues of rights to drug treatment, funding of methadone and other drug substitutes, considering insurance coverage for drug substitutes, and identifying obstacles to effective treatment.

Lastly, the Task Force on Racial and Class Disparities has been “studying the extent to which current drug policies have had a disproportionately adverse impact on racial minorities and the poor,⁵” and as a result, create drug policy that is less discriminatory.

¹ www.kcba.org/scriptcontent/kcba/druglaw/index.cfm

² www.kcba.org/scriptcontent/kcba/druglaw/index.cfm

³ www.kcba.org/scriptcontent/kcba/druglaw/intiatives.cfm

⁴ www.kcba.org/scriptcontent/kcba/druglaw/intiatives.cfm

⁵ www.kcba.org/scriptcontent/kcba/druglaw/intiatives.cfm