



LOUISIANA HIGHWAY SAFETY COMMISSION NEWS RELEASE

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Tri-Parish area judges participate in DWI pilot project

Judges in Acadia, Lafayette, and Vermilion Parishes will begin 2022 with a new tool in their toolkits for combatting impaired driving.

Starting today, misdemeanor DWI offenders in the tri-parish area will be screened for the presence of a substance use or mental health disorder, as part of a pilot project launched by the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission (LHSC) and funded through a grant by the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (Responsibility.org). Louisiana is one of only four states to receive the current grant award.

As a condition of probation for a first- or second-offense DWI conviction, participating judges will order offenders to be administered the Computerized Assessment and Referral System (CARS) screening tool. The CARS screening tool is one of only a handful of screening instruments validated specifically for impaired drivers.

Louisiana's most recent crash statistics show that 40 percent of vehicle fatalities were alcohol-related. The CARS screening will be administered to impaired driving offenders prior to sentencing, so that the findings can be used to inform judges of the offenders' treatment needs. This will enable judges to make better, more individualized sentencing decisions that will enhance the probability of achieving the ultimate goal of reducing alcohol- and drug-impaired driving recidivism.

"Screening impaired drivers for the presence of a substance use or mental health disorder is a proven impaired driving countermeasure that is supported by science and recommended by numerous national traffic safety experts," said Lisa Freeman, LHSC executive director. "Yet, it is an area in which Louisiana is sorely lacking, both in its statutes and in its criminal justice process."

Louisiana's impaired driving laws require substance use disorder screening only upon a third or subsequent DWI conviction.

Judge Jules D. Edwards, III (Ret.), the American Bar Association's judicial outreach liaison for Louisiana, was instrumental in bringing the CARS pilot project to fruition.

"We know that, in most cases, by the time offenders receive their third DWI conviction, they have driven impaired on numerous occasions. If there is an underlying cause for this dangerous behavior, we need to identify it as soon as possible to both get the offender the help that he needs and improve public safety," Edwards said.

Judges in the city courts of Abbeville, Crowley, Kaplan, Lafayette, and Rayne, as well as the judges in the 15th Judicial District Court, are participating in the CARS pilot project.

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