

SOBRIETY COURT

In Michigan, there is a good alternative to jail for habitual substance abusers called Sobriety Court. What exactly is it and how does it work? I'll try to explain it in a nutshell.

Each county has their own version along with their own criteria and the manner that it is administered. But for the most part they are rather similar with just subtle differences. As mentioned, Sobriety Court is an alternative for going to jail, or at the very least getting a reduced sentence. Usually you have to have at least two prior convictions for alcohol or other drug-related offenses, and no violent criminal history. You have to be a full-time resident of the county you're being charged in and you have to be of adult age, usually either 17 or 18.

The program is voluntary and the Probation Department will make a preliminary decision if you meet the criteria. The judge ultimately is the one that has to agree, but they often follow the recommendations of the prosecution. You can still go to jail even with Sobriety Court, but your jail sentence would be reduced because of Sobriety Court if that were the case. A lot of time there is no jail involved with Sobriety Court.

The program usually lasts anywhere from 18-24 months (again, the judge will decide) with three or four phases. The program usually starts off with its intensity at the highest and as if phase is completed, the intensity of the requirements slowly decreases. Again, each county has their own way they administer it, but that's the basic way they operate. The program usually consists of meetings such as NA, AA, CA, etc., community service, random drug and alcohol testing, random home visits, intense weekly meetings with your probation officer, and monthly review hearings with the judge to determine your progress. Think of it as an intensive form of probation. Just like with probation, if you successfully comply over a period of time, your time may be reduced or some of the requirements lessened as time goes on. But also be aware that if you are not meeting your Sobriety Court requirements, the judge can terminate the program and sentence you to jail. Make sure that Sobriety Court is a priority because you won't get many second chances with it.

All participants work together to help you succeed. The judge, the prosecutor, your probation officer all want to see you successfully make it through the program. Don't just use it as a means of getting out of jail. Make sure you take full advantage of the benefits that it brings. If you earnestly follow the program, you are well on your way of becoming drug or alcohol free which means that you are less likely to be a participant in the criminal justice system again. And they just don't leave you high and dry after you're done either. Not only do you live with the skills and tools to succeed and overcome your addictions, but they will offer continuing support through various and programs and meetings that can always help you along the way whenever you need it.

Make sure to ask your lawyer if you qualify for Sobriety Court and how to go about petitioning the Court. It's always good if you can get the prosecutor to agree on it. Convince them that you are a willing participant and a perfect candidate for Sobriety Court.