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PRESS RELEASE

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FROM: Michelle J. Ambrozaitis, Clare County Prosecuting Attorney

RE: Receipt of Federal Grant – Innovative Prosecuting Solutions for Combatting
Violent Crime and Illegal Opioids

If you have any questions please feel free to call me.

In March of 2018, the Bureau of Justice Assistance released a grant notification for Innovative Prosecution Solutions for Combatting Violent Crime and Illegal Opioids. According to their notice, only six of these grants would be awarded nationwide. The purpose of the grant is to encourage exploration of new solutions to public safety concerns regarding violent crime and the opioid epidemic. It will also support prosecutors as leaders among their criminal justice partners to develop strategies focused on reducing violent crime. The grant application called for prosecutors to establish ways to identify the most violent repeat offenders, develop mechanisms to prosecute individuals who are responsible for opioid related deaths or the sale of drugs leading to overdoses, and use of data to develop zone or geographic prosecution. The grant also called for the establishment of programs that focused on treatment rather than incarceration for those who suffer from substance abuse disorder.

Prosecutor Michelle Ambrozaitis applied for and received one of these available grant awards. The grant award will bring \$360,000.00 into the county over the course of a two-year period to enhance the investigation and prosecution of violent crime and drug crimes along with establishing another treatment option for those who suffer from substance abuse disorder.

Lori Phelps, Community Development Director, assisted with the grant application. “Without her knowledge and expertise in applying for grants, this wouldn’t have been possible,” said Ambrozaitis. Ambrozaitis also thanked the Clare County Sheriff’s Department, the Bay Area Narcotics Enforcement Team (BAYANET), Clare City Police Department, and MMR for providing the necessary data to support the grant application.

At the time of the grant application, 24.2% of Clare County’s population was living below the poverty level and we ranked eighty-three out of eighty-three counties for health – dead last in Michigan. A national study by the CDC ranked Clare County in the top 5% in the nation for vulnerability for HIV/HCV infections for people who use drugs. In the first quarter of 2018, BAYANET had already seized 12.7 grams of heroin, 14 units of hydromorphone, and an assorted mix of methamphetamine, crystal (ICE), suboxone, morphine, and marijuana, totaling approximately \$5,500 street value. The Clare City Police Department, which covers a three square mile area, investigated fourteen cases involving opiates, in four of those officers encountered loaded needles during the investigation. They responded to three overdose situations where they had to use Narcan, and had two overdose deaths. The Clare County Sheriff’s Department estimated that their deputies encounter needles in 75% of their interactions with suspects and that deputies had to use Narcan eighteen times. MMR provided the following statistics, that showed

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an alarming trend: in 2015 thirty-two patients required thirty-nine doses of Narcan; in 2016 thirty-six patients required forty-nine doses of Narcan; and, in 2017, forty-three patients required sixty-four doses of Narcan.

Prosecutor Ambrozaitis' plan covers four areas: investigation and prosecution, treatment and research, multi-disciplinary team approach, and education. An attorney position has been created to manage the grant and to prosecute all drug crimes and handle civil drug forfeiture cases that occur in Clare County. A substance abuse counselor will be hired to provide substance abuse counseling in the local jail for pre and post offenders. This substance abuse counselor will also manage the diversion program for those individuals who haven't been in trouble before for their substance abuse disorder and who are interested in becoming sober and avoiding a criminal record. A law enforcement officer will be contracted to assist in controlled substance investigations and to partner with BAYANET. Members of all law enforcement agencies, along with other criminal justice partners, will regularly meet to exchange information and identify geographical areas or individuals to target for more thorough investigation. An overdose death review team will also be established to review those cases to determine if the person who delivered the controlled substances that caused the death can be investigated and prosecuted.

Undersheriff Miedzianowski stated that, "We are grateful for the opportunity to partake in the collaborative effort of the Opioid Grant. It will allow the enforcement, education, and treatment of the opioid epidemic in our community. We will strive forward to reduce recidivism and strengthen our community response to this concern."

Ambrozaitis is excited about the grant. "We now have the ability to provide additional resources to assist those who would benefit from treatment for their substance abuse disorder. And, more importantly, we now have the additional resources to ensure that Clare County is no longer an attractive place to be for those who want to manufacture or deliver illegal substances."