

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Polling shows New Jersey residents support sentencing reform and treatment over prison**

TRENTON ... (Jan. 25, 2005) – Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) invited the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey (NCADD-NJ) to participate in a press conference announcing the results of an Eagleton Institute poll FAMM commissioned showing strong support in the state for sentencing reform. The FAMM findings mirror results from polling Eagleton did for NCADD-NJ in 2002 revealing most state residents to be in favor of treatment for an addiction rather than imprisonment for non-violent offenders.

The poll commissioned by FAMM finds that more than half the people in New Jersey (55 percent) either have a family member or know someone who has used illegal drugs or is imprisoned on a drug possession charge. A 2002 poll on state addiction issues Eagleton conducted for NCADD-NJ showed that an overwhelming majority in the state (89 percent) supported treatment rather than jail for a first-time drug offender who was determined to be addicted.

“Eagleton’s polling for FAMM demonstrates, quite dramatically, that a majority of state residents understand treatment instead of prison is the better course for people convicted of a non-violent drug possession charge,” John Hulick, director of NCADD-NJ’s Public Affairs Unit, said. “The polling is in keeping with the attitudes found in a survey Eagleton conducted for us a few years ago, with three in four New Jerseyans in favor of judges having discretion in sentencing rather than tying their hands with mandatory jail terms.”

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The FAMM poll found that three times more residents viewed mandatory treatment and community service as a more effective approach than prison for low-level non-violent offenders (69 percent vs. 21 percent). The poll also explored views about recidivism, producing the finding that 44 percent believe those imprisoned are likelier to return to criminal activity, while 13 percent thought those receiving treatment would have a higher probability of being repeat-offenders.

On drug courts, the polling determined that nearly three in four New Jerseyans favor such a program for offenders with an alcohol or drug problem and apply mandatory drug treatment in cases the judge deems appropriate. New Jersey recently broadened its drug courts to all 21 counties.

New Jersey's state prisons have 23,000 inmates, 35 percent of whom are serving terms for drug offences. Last year, a commission was established last year to review sentencing reform, with a report expected later this year. Sentencing reform has been undertaken in Pennsylvania and in New York, which recently eased the Rockefeller laws of the 1970s that instigated a national trend toward harsh sentences for even low-level offenders.

*NCADD-NJ has dedicated itself for more than 20 years to educating New Jersey's citizens about alcohol and drug use issues, to advocating on state policies concerning individuals addicted to alcohol or other drugs, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction. More information about the council is available at its website, [www.ncaddnj.org](http://www.ncaddnj.org).*

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