



# Morality should guide our fiscal policy

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As noted in a very disturbing front-page story by Deborah Highland in Sunday's Daily News, we are in the midst of a mental health crisis driven by addiction. But unlike many of the headlines these days, this tragedy is not unfolding in some distant city or foreign country.

It's happening right here on the streets of Bowling Green.

People suffering from addiction inflict a tremendous amount of pain – physical, emotional, psychological, financial – on themselves, their families and the community. Most of those afflicted with this overpowering yet ultimately curable disease will not recover unless they are provided with quality treatment services.

Warren County Attorney Amy Milliken astutely acknowledged that substance abuse treatment can be very effective in helping an addict overcome their ailment, but it can also be an expensive proposition – well beyond the financial capabilities of most who need it.

Yes, the court can order someone into treatment, but it is up to the petitioner to pay for the mandated services. So it's the same old story, those who need it the most can afford it the least.

Moreover, as BGD Deputy Chief Melanie Watts correctly observed, the crisis is only going to get worse until we – as a society – get a lot more serious about meeting the needs of all our citizens.

We can either pay now or we can pay later.

The practice of incarcerating addicts is, over time, much more costly than providing them with the treatment they need in order to overcome their illness.

The Matthew Casey Wethington Act for Substance Abuse Intervention should be immediately amended so that court-ordered treatment is paid for by state and local government.

It's all a matter of priorities. We shouldn't make ethical decisions based on perceived financial constraints – moral imperatives should always dictate fiscal policy.

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