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## Grant will help courts monitor alcohol use

**Lottery winner's foundation provides \$15,000 to make devices more affordable.**

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A philanthropic foundation plans to help Mecklenburg County's courts keep tabs on those charged and convicted of alcohol-related crimes.

The Wilson Family Foundation intends to provide a \$15,000 grant aimed at making an alcohol monitoring device more affordable for low-income offenders in the county, according to Billy Wilson, a member of the family.

Two-thirds of the money would be used to help low-income offenders pay for ankle bracelets that monitor whether they drink, Wilson said. The rest would be used for a study to determine how to make the device more affordable for such offenders.

The Wilson Family Foundation was set up with money that Billy's brother, Jeff, won in the \$88 million N.C. Powerball lottery last year.

The bracelets test an offender's sweat every half-hour for signs of alcohol use. In North Carolina, those monitored by the device are required to pay \$12 a day. Some judges have been reluctant to use the technology until they believe it is affordable for all.

The grant - which will likely be made through a local nonprofit known as Justice Initiatives - is aimed at addressing that.

Under a sliding scale proposed by the company that supplies the bracelets to the N.C. courts, low-income offenders could be allowed to pay half that amount, with wealthier people paying up to \$18 a day.

Mecklenburg Trial Court Administrator Todd Nuccio said the effort "should now put to rest the concerns of those few detractors who believe the technology cannot be deployed equitably."

"It will allow us to more widely employ a proven tool in holding defendants accountable and improving community safety," he said.

N.C. rules have impeded the use of the technology, recent Observer stories have shown. Under a provision in state law, judges aren't allowed to put the devices on offenders for more than 60 days.

That's how long Howard Pasour was ordered to wear the bracelet last year after his third DWI conviction. Pasour was allowed to remove the device in January. Today he's in jail, charged with causing a July crash in Gaston County that killed 17-year-old Laura Fortenberry. Authorities say he had been drinking.

In 2008, Mecklenburg County launched a six-month pilot program to make the bracelets available to 100 low-income offenders. But the program was canceled after just two months when a state Administrative Office of the Courts official sent the county manager's office an e-mail noting that state guidelines prohibited the technology's use in drug treatment courts.

Wilson, a former analyst for the county manager's office, also helped establish that pilot program. He expects this project will be more successful.

He says his desire to fund the effort stems largely from prior experience as a juvenile court counselor. In that job, he said, he came to realize the need for solutions that balance punishment with rehabilitation.

Some contend that alcoholics who can afford to support their habits should be able to pay for the alcohol monitoring device instead.

Wilson takes a different view.

"Alcoholism is a disease," said Wilson, 32, who lives in Iredell County.

"People will go out and buy their six-packs. That doesn't mean we should turn our backs on them," he said. "We have a job to create a safe environment for all to live in."



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