

Bill would give DAs more latitude with drug offenders

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The first time Maria Alexander's drug addiction caught up to her, the reckoning came in the form of a small chunk of crack cocaine that sent her to jail for six months.

The next time, after a small amount of heroin – “scrapings on a spoon,” Alexander recalled – earned her another stint in the correctional system, she sought treatment.

“I was no big drug dealer,” Alexander said. “I was a big user.”

In an announcement hailed as a sea change for the decades-old federal war on drugs, Attorney General Eric Holder said last week that he would direct federal prosecutors to avoid charging low-level drug offenders in ways that carry “draconian” minimum sentences.

“By reserving the most severe penalties for serious, high-level, or violent drug traffickers, we can better promote public safety, deterrence, and rehabilitation while making our expenditures smarter and more productive,” Holder told a San Francisco gathering of the American Bar Association last week.

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