



Circuit Court of St. Louis County
105 South Central Avenue
Clayton, Missouri 63105

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**ST. LOUIS COUNTY FAMILY COURT CONTINUES PROGRESS
MEETING GOALS OF AGREEMENT WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

*Sharp Drop in Number of Juveniles in Detention as Award-Winning
Community Collaboration Efforts Grow throughout the Region*

CLAYTON – The St. Louis County Family Court continues to make substantial progress toward achieving the goals of a 2016 agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, according to an independent review released today.

The review praised Judge Thea Sherry, Administrative Judge for the Family Court, for her “passion for and commitment to,” juvenile justice, noting that her “leadership has in large part facilitated the ‘can do’ attitude ... observed throughout the court system.”

The review was prepared by Judge Arthur E. Grim, a Pennsylvania judge, who is one of two independent auditors monitoring and rating the Court’s progress. Grim also praised the Court staff for its overall commitment to excellence. Under the terms of the agreement, progress reports will be issued every six months until the Court is in full compliance.

Since the last review in June of 2017, the Court has continued to boost its compliance ratings in ensuring that juveniles receive due process and adequate legal representation; data tracking and analysis, and reducing the number of juveniles held in the County Detention Center. After meeting with the two public defenders assigned to handle juvenile cases in the County, Grim said “the process implemented for indigent representation is working.”

The Court also was commended for hiring new data analysts to help determine why a disproportionately high number of black youth are referred to the Court by police, schools and the community at large, and help identify alternatives to secure detention. The additional analytical firepower “dramatically improves the ability of the Court to conduct ongoing and more advanced analyses,” the review found.

The average daily number of juveniles in secure detention has dropped sharply in the past year, due in part to the Court’s heightened focus on the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation more than 20 years ago, the JDAI

program was developed to help keep juveniles out of the justice system and with their families, schools and communities.

Research has shown that early contact with the juvenile justice system is a good predictor that a youth will return to the system having committed more serious, violent crime. The review recommended that the Court intensify diversionary measures to keep youth, especially those 14 and younger, out of the system.

Last month, the Family Court hosted its second JDAI community meeting, attended by more than 40 regional stakeholders including representatives from the St. Louis County Executive's office, area school districts, law enforcement, and faith-based and advocacy organizations. The Family Court was recently chosen to receive the 2018 "What's Right with the Region Award," for promoting racial equality and social justice through the JDAI program. The awards are presented annually by FOCUS St. Louis to individuals, organizations and initiatives working to improve the quality of life in the region.

A link to the full Department of Justice review can be found here:

http://www.stlcountycourts.com/DEP_Family_Court.php

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