



FAMILY COURT

Chief Judge Chandlee Johnson Kuhn

We are pleased to present the annual report of the Family Court of the State of Delaware. Family Court remains firmly committed to its statutory mission set forth in 10 *Del.C.* § 902(a),

“The court shall endeavor to provide for each person coming under its jurisdiction such control, care, and treatment as will best serve the interest of the public, the family, and the offender, to the end that the home will, if possible, remain unbroken and the family members will recognize and discharge their legal and moral responsibilities to the public and to one another.”

COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (CIP)

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) is a multi-year, federally funded grant project designed to support state courts in efforts to improve their handling of cases involving children in foster care, termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings. Delaware has participated in this project since its inception in 1994 and continues to utilize this federal resource to embark on a dynamic new partnership with the child welfare system by focusing on the common goal of improving the safety, stability and well-being of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Initial CIP efforts resulted in today’s best practice of having all stages of a dependency and neglect case heard by the same judge within a schedule of hearings and reviews that meet federal standards. More children and parents have representation, case plans are more meaningful, orders more consistently include detailed reasoning, and reunification or permanency is achieved more timely.

The Court is building on that foundation through a more active partnership with others in the child welfare system, primarily the Division of Family Services, but also with legal professionals, advocates and service providers. A number of judges serve as champions in particular subject areas, ena-

bling the Court to participate more proactively than reactively with other stakeholders.

Highlights include:

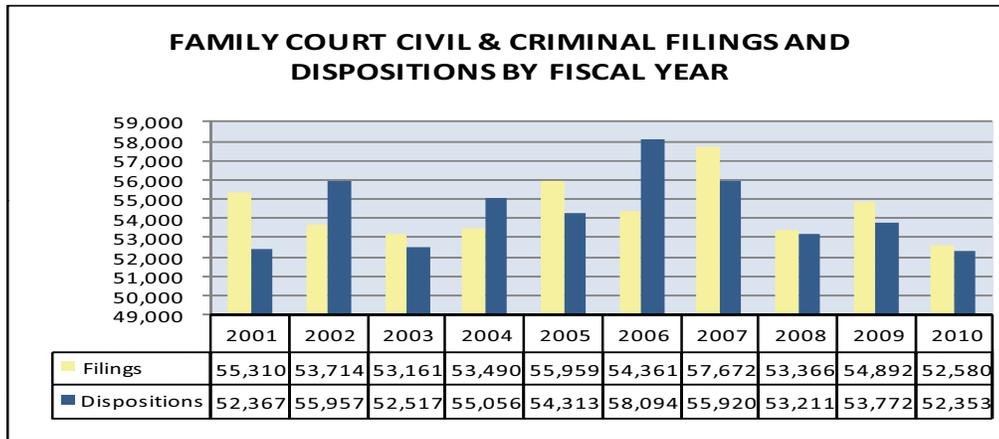
The Family Court actively assisted DSCYF in completing the federal Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to further the goal of providing all children with safe, permanent families in which their physical, emotional, and social needs are met. Members of the Court participate in ongoing workgroups focused on fulfilling the quarterly goals of the plan, as well as other work groups with system partners that focus on legislation, improving education, enhancing services for children, and ensuring they have lasting connections as they go through early adulthood.

Collaboration is advanced through quarterly meetings between Court and DFS leadership, as well as county level quarterly stakeholder meetings intended for partners to remedy local challenges and share beneficial information.

The CIP Judges continue to meet with the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) to discuss matters of interest to youth in foster care. YAC members and Judges remain in contact, and YAC members are speaking at Court sponsored training sessions, or participating as panel members.

Because of its sweeping systemic reforms, the Delaware Family Court was selected as a study site for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to evaluate the impact of CIP. Pal Tech is conducting the court-focused evaluation in New Castle County under contract with HHS. The study began in the fall of 2006 and will take place over a five-year period. It includes observations and empirical information regarding the impact of court reforms, including their influence on the Division of Family Services and its ability to meet federal child welfare requirements.

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JUVENILE JUSTICE

Mental Health Diversion Court

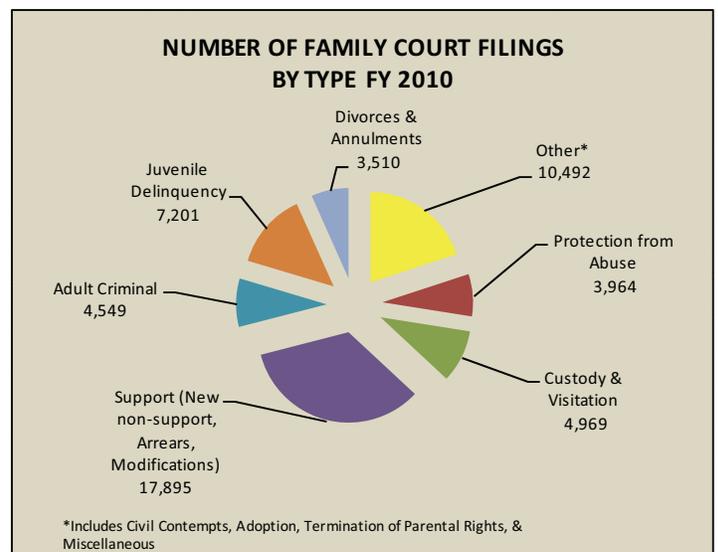
In 2006, the Family Court, in collaboration with the Office of the Public Defender and the Division of Child Mental Health, received federal grant money through the Criminal Justice Council to pilot a Mental Health Diversion Court for juveniles with delinquency charges pending against them in the New Castle County Family Court. The program offers a treatment-based resolution of the delinquency charges of juvenile offenders with mental health disorders. The program began in January of 2007 and quickly acquired a full caseload. Since the programs inception, 94 juveniles have entered into the program and 58 have graduated. Of the 58 juveniles who have graduated from the program, 82% of them have not picked up new charges within six months of graduation.

In conjunction with the Mental Health Court program, the Family Court in New Castle County has created a dedicated juvenile competency calendar for conducting competency hearings and monitoring compliance with treatment recommendations for non-competent juveniles still facing open charges. One dedicated judge is assigned to hear and track all the competency hearings.

Gun Court

In April of 2009, in response to the increasing level of gun violence in the state, Chief Judge Kuhn implemented a Gun Court Calendar in New Castle County. Today, the specialized calendar has expanded to Kent and Sussex Counties. The Chief Judge presides over the calendar, hearing all case reviews, preliminary hearings and motions for all cases involving juveniles with firearm charges, as well as reviews after a finding of guilt or as a condition of a sentence.

The Gun Court provides Delaware's juveniles with an exclusive forum in which to resolve these cases quickly while providing sentencing that includes appropriate treatment, rehabilitation efforts and close court supervision.



As a result of the collaboration between the Family Court, Department of Justice, Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, and law enforcement, Gun Court has been effective in substantially decreasing the population of juveniles charged with gun crimes being detained at the New Castle County Detention Center. These serious cases are being resolved more quickly and efficiently and are subject to judicial oversight.

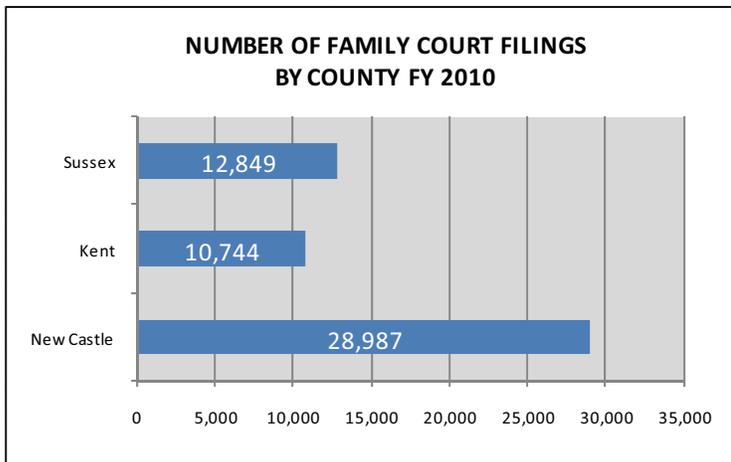
SERVICES FOR SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

In its continued effort to serve the ever-growing *pro se* litigant population, the Family Court introduced several new initiatives during the past year, while continuing to offer a high level of service to those who seek assistance in repre-

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senting themselves. Over 39,000 litigants were assisted in the Family Court Resource Centers statewide, reflecting the national and statewide trend of increasing self-representation in domestic relations law.

Last year, the Family Court partnered with nCourt, and developed an automated and secure filing system in the area of child custody which is funded by the users who pay a small convenience fee. The system prompts litigants to fill in information and answer a series of questions related to their filing, while at the same time providing them with instructions and information related to their filing and the law. At the conclusion of the questions, the system creates the forms that need to be filed for a particular type of pleading. Litigants then pay their court fees and a convenience fee online and are notified when the Family Court has accepted and processed their petition. The end result is a more accurate and legally correct pleading that can be created and filed at the litigants' convenience. The Court expanded its electronic delivery services to divorce and motions this year.



The Family Court continued its efforts to develop and implement instructional packets and resources in a variety of new areas. In addition to developing resources for its self-represented population, the Director of Pro Se Services will begin to focus on staff trainings as a newly named Director of Pro Se and Professional Services. The Director will create training resources and modules designed to increase competency and efficiency of Family Court staff that will enable the Court to better serve the public.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In staying at the forefront of developments in the area of domestic violence, the Family Court has taken on a number of tasks to promote the forward momentum in this area.

In its continued efforts to provide protection and relief to victims of domestic violence, as well as ensure treatment and counseling for offenders, Family Court has created a specialized domestic violence court. The intention of this specialized court is twofold: to create greater continuity in Family Court cases involving domestic violence and to create a more standardized system of compliance for offenders.

In January 2008, Family Court began conducting Protection from Abuse review hearings. These hearings are being scheduled before the Court when a Respondent has not complied with the evaluation and treatment conditions of an active Protection from Abuse order. These reviews do not require the Petitioner to file a contempt petition in order for a hearing to be scheduled. The Court is currently reviewing this process to possibly expand review hearings to other conditions in of the Protection from Abuse order.

In addition to conducting PFA review hearings, Family Court was able to secure federal grant money to continue with the position of the Domestic Violence Court Project Coordinator to promote the efforts of the specialized domestic violence court statewide. The Coordinator will continue to monitor compliance, provide training to court staff as needed and attend various meetings of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council on behalf of Family Court.

Lastly, on July 1, 2010 Delaware Capitol Police began providing a police officer dedicated to Family Court on PFA hearing duty in each of the three Family Courts located in New Castle, Kent, and Sussex counties. This officer will be assigned to provide a police presence at the hearings and waiting rooms to reduce the potential of violence and to maintain a safe and secured environment for anyone directly involved with PFA issues and concerns.

This officer will also be assigned to liaison with the PFA advocates to ensure that the victims who need additional attention are provided that service. The officer will (upon request) escort victims to/from the courthouse and coordinate with local law enforcement to provide escorts outside of the immediate area.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA) PROGRAM

The Family Court CASA Program continues to recruit and train volunteers to provide advocacy for abused and neglected children involved in court proceedings. The CASA volunteers establish the child's best interest by gathering information and monitoring the circumstances surrounding

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the child(ren) in question. The statewide program continues to operate within each Family Court location. Diligent efforts are in place to train and recruit interested individuals to be a powerful voice for children. The CASA Program used several recruiting techniques such as: outdoor billboards along well traveled routes throughout the state; advertisements in local newspapers, radio stations, and website advertisements on Volunteer Match, Mentors, National CASA Volunteer Referrals and the Family Court CASA website. The CASA Program participated in many community events throughout the state as another means to recruit volunteers. As a result, the program has increased the exposure and knowledge about the volunteer opportunities, resulting in the doubling of the new volunteer pool from the previous year. The CASA Program has been a model used by National CASA to share with other CASA programs across the country in reference to our volunteer recruitment, new volunteer and diversity training.

Currently the program has over 255 volunteers serving over 610 children. On several occasions this year, CASA together with the Office of the Child Advocate, was able to provide 100% representation for Delaware's Children. Our diverse group of volunteers represents many professionals from distinct backgrounds and locations within the state. New volunteer training (offered quarterly) and in-service trainings (offered monthly) are extended to all volunteers within the program. Each volunteer receives over 30 hours of con-

tinuing education a year (12 hours are required annually). Over 3500 hours of service is given by the volunteers on a monthly basis, as they speak for the children we serve. Over 50% of our volunteers have remained assigned to a case beyond the 18 month commitment. The Family Court CASA Program continues to grow and make a difference for Delaware's children.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Over the past year, Family Court's HR Department has partnered with the Administrative Leadership team and focused on three (3) main areas: 1) employee engagement, 2) effective leadership, and 3) developing 'best practices'. These three elements were instrumental in helping grow and develop Family Court's employees. Through various trainings such as *Coaching for Success*, *Performance Management*, and *Sexual Harassment*, Family Court was able to sharpen the skills and knowledge of its current supervisors in an effort to help them become more effective, strategic leaders.

Overall, the Human Resources Department, in collaboration with the Administrative Leadership Team, is committed to creating a challenging work environment that focuses on talent management, talent acquisition and organization effectiveness; while at the same time making Family Court the 'employer of choice'.



Front row (sitting left to right)

Judge William M. Nicholas
Judge Jay H. Conner
Chief Judge Chandlee Johnson Kuhn
Judge Kenneth M. Millman
Judge William J. Walls, Jr.

Second row (standing left to right)

Judge Arlene Minus Coppadge
Judge Aida Wasserstein
Judge Barbara D. Crowell
Judge Joelle P. Hitch
Judge Mardi F. Pyott

Back row (standing left to right)

Judge Mark D. Buckworth
Judge Peter B. Jones
Judge Michael K. Newell
Judge William L. Chapman, Jr.
Judge Robert B. Coonin
Judge John E. Henriksen
Judge Alan N. Cooper