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Delaware Courts launch efforts to improve, standardize and streamline Problem-Solving Courts

The Delaware Judiciary has taken the first steps to improve, enhance and streamline Delaware's problem-solving courts.

The improvement efforts were kicked off today with the release of the final report of the Criminal Justice Council of the Judiciary (CJCJ) at the Carvel State Office Building in Wilmington. The CJCJ was formed in October 2014 by order of the Delaware Supreme Court following Chief Justice Leo E. Strine Jr.'s call for a review of the problem-solving courts and their operations. The CJCJ is chaired by Superior Court Judge William C. Carpenter, Jr. and co-chaired by Superior Court President Judge Jan R. Jurden who led a team of judicial officers in their extensive substantive review of each problem-solving court throughout the State.

This review culminated in the CJCJ's "Report on Delaware's Problem-Solving Courts." The report contains a series of recommendations to improve Delaware's problem-solving courts by enabling them to operate more efficiently and consistently while providing the same level of specialized attention designed to address the root causes of recurring issues among those with mental health issues and substance abuse issues and those unique to veterans.

In conjunction with the release of the report on Monday, April 24, 2017, Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. signed a Supreme Court order consolidating the Superior Court and Court of Common Pleas Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts in New Castle County to test the initiative, and assigning a pool of qualified designated judicial officers as a rational and cost-effective way of maximizing scarce resources and promoting judicial efficiency. The cross-designation of three Superior Court judges and one Superior Court commissioner, and four Court of Common Pleas judges will allow them greater flexibility in handling cases involving lower-level felonies and misdemeanors, where the focus is more often on treatment issues and working to ensure compliance with treatment rather than on punishment. These judicial officers possess the knowledge, training and experience with problem-solving courts that will ultimately increase public safety, reduce recidivism and rehabilitate offenders.

By combining these problem-solving courts, the Delaware Judiciary is able to conserve resources while still offering the benefits of a specialty treatment court to the community. Combining the courts also assists our criminal justice partners, like treatment providers and Probation and Parole, by significantly reducing the number of court proceedings they will have to staff.

The full CJCJ report can be found on the Delaware Courts website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/aoc/publications.aspx>.

The Delaware Judiciary is also pleased to announce it has received a \$300,000 grant that will be used to fund a 36-month project to develop statewide core standards and policies for problem-solving courts in Delaware and to fund a contractual statewide problem-solving court coordinator, Brenda A. M. Wise. The grant is funded through the Delaware Criminal Justice Council by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Adult Drug Court Program.

"Over the past two decades, problem solving courts have been created primarily because of the interest of a judge or Court to address a particular issue or need occurring in that Court. While these problem-solving courts have provided important services, as they have grown, they have placed increased demands on the limited resources available to the Delaware Judiciary. The CJCJ report is important as it is the first formal and independent review of how our various problem-solving court initiatives are performing. The report provides detailed recommendations on how these services can be provided using national 'best practices' standards for such courts; and sets forth a clear vision of the future for these initiatives," said President Judge Jurden and Judge Carpenter.

As a part of the reorganization of the problem-solving courts, there will now also be an increased focus on gathering statistics and tracking outcomes in order to further refine the problem-solving court system and ensure that the courts are producing the desired, positive results without overburdening or draining critical resources from traditional court operations. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) will be a partner with the Delaware Courts as a part of the 36-month project to establish best practices and develop tools to allow individual courts to assess their compliance with the new standards. The information generated by this program should help develop baseline information for further efforts to improve the functioning of these courts and provide a standard for other court systems to use in the future.

"We would like to thank the Criminal Justice Council and the National Center for State Courts for their assistance in helping us secure this important grant and launch this important problem-solving court initiative," said Delaware State Court Administrator Patricia Griffin. "We are also grateful for the Criminal Justice Council of the Judiciary's thorough review of Delaware's problem-solving courts, which laid the groundwork for this project and will serve as the blueprint for efforts to improve these courts' operations."

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