

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Delaware Judiciary, State Leaders Mark 50TH Anniversary of Delaware Family Court

On Tuesday Sept. 7, 2021 on the Legislative Mall in Dover, members of the Delaware Judiciary and state government leaders gathered to mark the 50th anniversary of the Family Court of the State of Delaware.

While the origins of Family Court date back to 1911 with the Juvenile Court for Wilmington, the modern-day statewide Family Court began in 1971 with the unification of what had then been separate, smaller family court systems into a single statewide court.

Sept. 7, 1971 is regarded as the “birthday” of Family Court in that it was the date that legislation creating the statewide court took effect, after it was signed three months earlier by Governor Russell W. Peterson.

Tuesday’s event was held outside on the mall, under a tent, as a precaution due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell acted as master of ceremonies and welcomed the crowd and dignitaries to the anniversary event. He started by praising the actions of state leaders 50 years ago who “had the remarkable foresight to create one, unified statewide Family Court to address some of the most personal and intimate problems facing citizens of Delaware. In my conversations with work and other juvenile and family court judges from around our country, I always come away with the unquestioned feeling that we did it right,” he said.

Governor John Carney then took the podium to present a proclamation to mark the occasion and to offer what he said was “a simple message of thanks” to all the judicial officers and court staff of the Family Court for all the hard work they do every day.

“For 50 years the Family Court has answered the call to resolve the most personal of disputes that do not fall neatly within the legal profession’s one side wins/one side loses paradigm,” said Chief Justice Collins. J. Seitz, Jr. He then added his own thanks to Family Court officials for their hard work in resolving these difficult matters for Delaware families. “I often think about the heavy weight of these cases on the shoulders of our family court judicial officers, and the psychological toll these cases take on a judicial officer’s professional and personal life. When I read the heartbreaking family stories in the daily diet of the Family Court, I know how these cases must follow you home at night.”

And the Chief Justice not only looked to the past of the court, but also to the future, thanking Gov. Carney and state legislators for their vision in supporting funding to build new Family Court facilities in Kent and Sussex counties, so that Family Court will “have safe and dignified family court judicial facilities to meet the challenges of the next 50 years.”

Earlier this year, the General Assembly appropriated \$131 million for the construction of new Family Court facilities in Kent and Sussex counties. Groundbreaking on the new Family Court courthouse in Sussex County is expected later this year.

Other speakers at the 90-minute program included former Supreme Court Justice Randy J. Holland, retired Family Court Judge Jay H. Conner, Delaware State Senate President Pro Tempore David P. Sokola – who presented a proclamation from the Senate – and State Rep. Krista M. Z. Griffith – who was a former prosecutor in Family Court and presented a proclamation from the Delaware House.

The program concluded with remarks from Steven Marz, Director and State Archivist for the Delaware Public Archives, who accepted a number of Family Court documents and artifacts for the state collection.