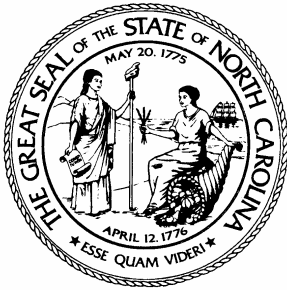


Unified Family Courts of North Carolina

Family Court Counties

Anson	Buncombe
Burke	Caldwell
Catawba	Cumberland
Durham	Greene
Halifax	Lenoir
Mecklenburg	Montgomery
Moore	New Hanover
Pender	Pitt
Randolph	Richmond
Stanly	Union
Wake	Wayne



OUR MISSION

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To help resolve cases involving children and families through combined efforts of the family, the Court and community services.

*

To approach each case in a way that is not overly adversarial or intrusive but always in a just, timely and efficient manner.

*

To be courteous, safe, and accessible and to provide quality service to those in need.

MECKLENBURG COUNTY FAMILY COURT: BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST & CONFIDENCE THROUGH SERVICE, EXCELLENCE AND LEADERSHIP

The Mecklenburg County Family Court Division was established in 1999 to respond to cases involving families and children more efficiently. By reducing the amount of time it takes to move from filing to disposition and by using a variety of intervention services, Family Courts are improving outcomes for families and children across the state. Listed below are Mecklenburg County Family Court's recent notable achievements.

LOWERED THE NUMBER AND LENGTH OF TIME CASES AWAIT RESOLUTION. Through increased judicial leadership, intensive case management and the investment of one additional staff person, the percentage of domestic cases pending over one year dropped from 41% to 17% over the course of fifteen months. The median case age dropped from 246 days to 86 days, respectively. Though recognized as having the highest case volume in the state, Mecklenburg Family Court has achieved its lowest pending caseload in ten years!

PILOTED THE COMPLEX DOMESTIC LITIGATION TRACK. The Complex Domestic Litigation Track is designed to improve case flow management in the resolution of complex domestic legal issues that require four or more trial days. Rather than languishing due to insufficient court time to hear complex matters these cases are scheduled on the complex track for time certain dates to be promptly tried and resolved. Early evaluation of the pilot program reflects fewer continuances, earlier resolution of claims and reduced backlog.

PRESENTED LOCALLY DEVELOPED JUDICIAL PROTOCOL AT NC JUDICIAL CONFERENCE. The Family Court Administrator's Office chaired a collaborative of legal and community stakeholders in the development of a flexible judicial protocol designed for use when presiding in domestic cases involving self-represented litigants. In October 2007, the *Honorable Ben S. Thalheimer* and Family Court Administrator Elisa Chinn-Gary had the privilege of

presenting the protocol and its usefulness to a statewide audience of district court judges at the 2007 North Carolina Association of District Court Judges' Fall Conference.

IMPLEMENTED JUVENILE COURT GEO-DISTRICTS. To address the growing urban population and its diverse geographic needs, the Juvenile Court organized into four geographic districts. The goals of the geo-district plan include: increased utilization of court time; increased knowledge of available community resources; and the promotion of teamwork among agencies serving families and children.

DEVELOPED EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR PARENTS ENTERING PERMANENCY COURT. In February 2008, the educational video *"The Clock is Ticking"* began telecast in the Juvenile Court waiting area. The video, developed by Family Court stakeholders, explains the steps necessary to achieve reunification and highlights the benefit of the Permanency Mediation Program and Family Drug Treatment Program. A reference handbook accompanies the video and is available in English and Spanish.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER PLACEMENTS. The Family Law Facilitator program is the result of an innovative collaboration between the Family Courts and the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services. The program is staffed by independently contracted attorneys who provide limited scope legal services to relative and kin care providers seeking custody of children placed in their care as a result of abuse, neglect and/or dependency. As of May 2008, over sixty-five children have achieved permanency through the program.

THE INTERACTIVE COURT FORMS PROJECT. Building public trust and confidence and promoting access to justice are the guiding principles in the development of the Interactive Court Forms Project. This project introduces an innovative, self-sustaining, web-based program that offers friendly on-screen guides to assist users in completing properly formatted legal

News From Other Family Court Jurisdictions

Cumberland County - Judicial District 12: In order to expedite cases involving children and families through the combined efforts of the family, the Court and community services, Cumberland County Family Court began utilizing Permanency Mediation in March 2008. In April, **Chief District Court Judge Elizabeth Keever** hosted a Lunch and Learn event to educate the local bar and the mediators on the process and benefits of conducting permanency mediation sessions.
[Mia.M.LaMotte@nccourts.org]

Halifax County - Judicial District 6A: Best wishes to **Chief District Court Judge H. Paul McCoy, Jr.** who will be retiring on July 31st after 29 distinguished years on the bench. Judge McCoy brought Family Court to District 6A in 2000. His leadership was instrumental in developing a strong Family Court program that now offers a wide range of services that make access to the court system more open to everyone. Judge McCoy has served on the NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Committee; State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; Chair, North Carolina Court Improvement Project for Children and Families and co-chair of a sub-committee to revise the juvenile code; Rural Courts Commission; Judicial Forms Committee and chair of a subcommittee on juvenile forms; PIP - review of child and family service reviews for DHHS regarding the court's involvement; Board of Governor's of the Judges' Association; past president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer of the District Court Judges' Association; Judicial Council subcommittee on salary and benefits as

well as many local committees. Upon his retirement, Judge McCoy plans to become a visiting judge and conduct mediations. [Susan.W.Horrell@nccourts.org]

Lenoir/Greene/Wayne Counties - Judicial District 8: The Family Court Administrator's Office was pleased to support and participate in April's Child Abuse Prevention Month. Activities included the flag raising ceremony, sporting events, literary contest and candlelight vigils. The most impressive moment was the placement of 276 shoes of all sizes representing those worn by the children. Among those were 34 pairs of black shoes, placed in the center, to represent the 34 deaths in North Carolina due to abuse.
[Laura.H.Smith@nccourts.org]

Stanly/Anson/Richmond Counties - Judicial District 20A: In January 2008, the Stanly County Family Court office moved to newly renovated offices on the fourth floor of the Stanly County Courthouse. This area now houses Child Custody Orientation, Child Custody Mediation and other child-focused hearings. [Tennelle.W.Hann@nccourts.org]

Union County - Judicial District 20B: Union County Family Court welcomes Lori McNeil as the new Family Drug Treatment Court/Juvenile Case Coordinator. She replaces Jessica Mangum who moved into the position of Judicial Assistant I. We also congratulate Angie Cole who will be extending her service as a 30 hour Arbitration Coordinator (Judicial Assistant) by adding 10 hours to support the Child Custody Mediation Program in Districts 20A & 20B.
[Martha.S.Hall@nccourts.org]

... Mecklenburg Family Court *continued*

pleadings while learning the required steps to bring their case before the Court. This technology promises to improve the efficiency of the courts in processing filings prepared by self-represented litigants while expanding the self-help services offered to the Spanish-speaking community. This project was made possible through sponsorship provided by the North Carolina Bar Association, the Mecklenburg County Bar and the County of Mecklenburg.

THE ATTORNEY FOR THE DAY PROGRAM. The ranks of attorneys providing free legal consultations to low-income, self-represented litigants in the area of family law are steadily increasing. In 2007, volunteer attorneys conducted 127 consultations. In addition, volunteer attorneys supervise evening and weekend legal clinics offered by Family Court and the Charlotte School of Law.
[Elisa.A.Chinn-Gary@nccourts.org]

Family Court Sound Bites

Family Courts provide a constructive and effective approach to very tough problems. ~Robin Hudson, Associate Justice, North Carolina Supreme Court

In the eyes of a child, time is a critical factor. A month can seem like a year. Four months an eternity. Being deliberate and swift in making decisions about a child's permanence is CRITICAL. The data clearly shows that the Family Court is a much more time efficient process for children and families.
~Frank Crawford, Executive Director, Youth Homes, Inc.

Family Court programs work. ~Tyrone Wade, Managing DSS Attorney, Mecklenburg County

Family Court has allowed the court system to be more organized and much more predictable as to when cases will be calendared and heard. This is very important to the public and to those of us who practice within the system.

~Dale Ann Plyler, Union County Attorney

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