

COURT BULLETIN

In this issue...

- Housing Court Expansion Proposed
- Also on the Hill:
 - The Budget Heads into Committee
 - Constituent Services Event Held at State House
 - Court Leaders Testify on Mandatory Minimums
- Court Hears from Public on Record Access
- Celebrating Success: Facilities Team Fixes Flood Damage at the Fenton
- Drug Court Teams Hold Commencements
- "Signature Counter Experience" Training Helps Staff Handle Busy Courthouse Counters
- The Court & The Community:
 - Lawrence District Court Judges Engage Students at Civics Day
 - Lawrence Superior Court Honors the Late Assistant Clerk Kevin Jones
 - Framingham Juvenile Court Inspires Young Artists

Housing Court Expansion Proposed

The legislature's Joint Committee on the Judiciary held a hearing late last month to receive testimony regarding proposals to expand the jurisdiction of the Housing Court throughout the Commonwealth. The Housing Court currently has five divisions and the department's ten judges travel to cover large geographic areas. The Supreme Judicial Court's Access to Justice Commission recommended the expansion in order to provide access to the nearly one-third of the state's residents currently without access to a housing court.

If enacted, the legislation would ensure the availability of Housing Court judges, specialists and resources to individuals who now resolve their cases in the District Court. The departments would continue to have concurrent jurisdiction so that residential housing matters could be filed in either court.

Bar representatives for both landlords and tenants, municipal code enforcement officials, concerned citizens and organizations representing a broad cross-section of community services from across the

Commonwealth filled the crowded hearing room. Proponents of the expansion say the Housing Court offers expertise and resources to help prevent homelessness, to utilize receiverships to assist in reclaiming troubled buildings and to adjudicate or otherwise help to resolve the variety of issues that arise between landlords and tenants.

In his testimony before the Joint Committee, Housing Court Chief Justice Steven Pierce informed the legislators that the Housing Court was established over 40 years ago with a singular focus on residential housing. He stated that the expansion of its jurisdiction to the remaining areas of Massachusetts would be historic in completing the goal of providing access to the court's unique expertise to all citizens of the Commonwealth.

To learn more visit: [Housing Court 4 All.org](http://HousingCourt4All.org) which includes details on the proposed expansion and the geography affected.

On the Hill...

The Budget Heads into Committee

The House and Senate versions of the FY16 budget are currently in Conference Committee. The six-member committee is tasked with reconciling the House's \$622 million and Senate's \$633 million versions of the Trial Court's budget, and issuing a compromise bill which will then be presented to the House and Senate for ratification.

This budget season, the Committee's members are: Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen Spilka, Senate Ways and Means Vice Chair Salvatore DiDominico, Senator Viriato "Vinny" deMacedo, House Ways and Means Chair Brian Dempsey, House Ways and Means Vice Chair Stephen Kulik, and Representative Todd Smola.

The current fiscal year ends [June 30](#). The Committee must reach a compromise and allow both chambers to vote before the FY16 budget goes to the Governor for signature and goes into effect.

Constituent Services Event Held at State House



Housing Court Field Coordinator Vincenzo LoBuono (left) provides information about eviction proceedings to a State House staff member.

An event held to inform legislative staff on issues of general interest to constituents was held in the Document Reading Room at the State House earlier this month. Introductory remarks were given by SJC Chief Justice Ralph Gants, Trial Court Chief Justice Paula Carey, Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo, and President of the Senate Stanley Rosenberg.

Other speakers included: District Court Judge Robert Cornetta, who provided an overview on the structure of the Trial Court; District Court Director of Specialty Courts Judge Mary Hogan Sullivan discussed the growing role of specialty courts; Jury Commissioner Pamela Wood spoke about jury selection and service; and Access to Justice Coordinator Erika Rickard covered resources for self-represented litigants. Court staff were on hand to provide materials and answer questions at seven informational tables on various topics.

Court Leaders Testify on Mandatory Minimums

Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph Gants testifies to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary on the topic of mandatory minimum sentences with regard to drug crimes. In the foreground, Commissioner of Probation Edward Dolan reviews his testimony.

Read Chief Justice Gants' [remarks to the Committee](#)>>

Read *MassInc's* [coverage of the event](#)>>



Court Hears from Public on Record Access



Members of the Public Access to Court Records Committee listen to input at a public meeting held earlier this month.

About two dozen pre-registered speakers joined 40 others at a public hearing before the Public Access to Court Records Committee on [June 15th](#) at the Suffolk County Courthouse. The Committee wanted to obtain the views of interested individuals and organizations on issues surrounding the public's access to court case records, including the availability of case records [on the internet.>>](#)

Celebrating Success: Facilities Team Fixes Flood Damage at the Fenton

Each issue of the Court Bulletin highlights one of many success stories happening throughout the court system. Please send us your examples of local successes.

Disaster never takes a holiday...The finishing touches on extensive repairs to Lawrence's Fenton Justice Center, caused by severe flooding on Super Bowl [Sunday](#), were completed this month.

A few hours before kickoff, Matthew Sepe, Manager of Court Facilities for Region 3, was notified by the Lawrence Fire Department of an alarm at [the courthouse.>>](#)



Members of the Facilities team at the Fenton Judicial Center in Lawrence who worked nights and weekends for months to repair flood damage are, from left: Maintenance Technicians Richard Croswell and Alex Mendez; Facilities Supervisor Steven Zalewski, who managed the project; Custodian Mark Wong; Facilities Supervisors Angela Coutinho and Pedro Andrade; Custodian Glenn Deane. In the back row are Facilities Supervisor Ivan Jusino and Custodian Nelson Santos.

Drug Court Teams Hold Commencements

June is graduation season, and the Trial Court's specialty courts celebrated the successful completion of several drug court programs, with dozens of participants graduating across the state. Specialty courts use evidence-based practices recommended by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals to supervise high-risk, high-need probationers who suffer with addiction. Recent events were held at the Quincy and Dudley District Courts, and at the Dorchester and South Boston Divisions of the Boston Municipal Court.



Judge Serge Georges Jr. of the Dorchester Division of the Boston Municipal Court congratulates Drug Court graduate Robert Cavic. Judge Georges said that the ceremony was a "Commencement and not a graduation, because it represents a new beginning in the lives of these individuals."

From left, Worcester County District Attorney Joseph Early Jr., Chief Probation Officer Nilza Sylvestre, Judge Timothy Bibaud, and Assistant District Attorney John Sares congratulated fifteen participants from Dudley District Court's Drug Court at their graduation earlier this month.



[Read local coverage of the event>>](#)

"Signature Counter Experience" Training Helps Staff Handle Busy Courthouse Counters

Efficiency, meet empathy. Does your job involve helping people at your courthouse's counter? How prepared are you to deal with a difficult or emotional person?

A new training program aims to give court staff the tools they need to handle high volumes of requests and everyday interactions at the courthouse counter, both of which [can be stressful.>>](#)



May I help you? Middlesex Probate & Family Court Case Coordinator Domingas Brandao and Operations Supervisor Don Hickey enact a typical customer experience at their courthouse's busy counter, while trainers Vanessa McClinchy and John Laing Jr. provide feedback. The course, shown here at the Adams Courthouse in Boston, offers practical tips for counter staff to interact with the public more effectively, and includes ways to diffuse potentially stressful situations.

The Courts & The Community...

Lawrence District Court Judges Engage Students at Civics Day



Lawrence District Court Judge Mark Sullivan engages middle school students last month at North Andover Middle School in a lively discussion about the rule of law in a democracy. They also discussed the responsibilities of judges and what it's like to hear cases. As part of their civic education day, the students learned how to use a "fact pattern" to help them reach a decision on an OUI by using facts based on an actual case. Lawrence District Court First Justice Lynn Rooney and Judge Sullivan joined Michael Ryan, Communications Coordinator for the Office of Jury Commissioner, and Representative Diana DiZoglio for a civics presentation to approximately 150 students.

"We thought it would be more interesting and relevant to use real-world examples to illustrate the work judges do, and to experience how the rule of law works in a constitutional democracy," said Judge Rooney, who hopes that the students' day will inspire some to consider legal careers.

"It's important that judges and jurors alike consider only the facts before them related to a particular case," said Judge Sullivan. "To come to a just and fair decision, the kids learned how important it is to focus only on the facts before them, and exclude information that isn't relevant."

Lawrence Superior Court Honors the Late Assistant Clerk Kevin Jones



Court staff at the Lawrence Superior Court dedicated a plaque and podium built by the students of the Greater Lawrence Vocational Technical School in honor of the late Kevin Jones, who served as the Assistant Clerk of the Lawrence/Essex Superior Court for 32 years. Shown at the ceremony in front of the new podium are, from left: Court Officer Michael Walsh, Judge James Lang, retired Judge Howard Whitehead, Judge Robert Cornetta, and members of the Jones family. (Photo: Marissa Furnari, Judicial Secretary).

Framingham Juvenile Court Inspires Young Artists



The Framingham Juvenile Court hosted a reception this month featuring the work of young artists, who shared their work with members of the judiciary, the court system, and the legislature. The Art Inspiration project invites young artists to give back to the community by beautifying the Framingham Juvenile courthouse, and creating a more hopeful environment.

Participants in the project included youth from the Probation Department, the Department of Youth Services, the Framingham Boys and Girls Club, the Department of Mental Health, Wayside Youth & Family Support Tempo Program, and Elliot Human Services.

Shown in photo: Representative Carolyn Dykema admires work by a young artist. Others attending the event included Trial Court Chief Justice Paula Carey, Juvenile Court Chief Justice Amy Nechtem, Framingham Juvenile Court First Justice Jay Blitzman, and Judge Gloria Tan. [Read local coverage of the event>>](#)



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Coming up in our July/August issue:

Enhanced Families Through Literature: A Judge's Journal

Facilities Update and New Projects