



MICHAEL W. MORRISSEY
NORFOLK DISTRICT ATTORNEY

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

NORFOLK DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

45 SHAWMUT ROAD | CANTON, MA 02021 | 781.830.4800 | F: 781.830.4801 | www.norfolkda.com

Press Release

Court, police and DA Michael Morrissey, Improve security at Probate and Family Court

Contact: D.Traub, 781-830-4917



Chief Justice of the Probate and Family Court Angela Ordonez, First Justice John Casey, District Attorney Michael Morrissey and Register of Probate Patrick McDermott, together at center right, met with Canton Police Chief Kenneth Berkowitz and Chief Court Officer Patricia Bellotti, 2nd and 4th from left, and other officials last week to roll out enhanced security for the court.

Judges, court officers, trial court security officials, Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey and local police met this week to roll out a battery of improved security measures for the Norfolk County Probate and Family Court seen as a possible model for other courts.

Massachusetts Court Officers, who maintain order and escort defendants in custody from holding cells into courtrooms, have always been unarmed. "Unlike district and superior courts, the family court is not usually host to armed police officers conducting court business," District Attorney Morrissey said.

"It is a place where people's marriages dissolve, access to their children is at stake, assets are divided, where people face the most volatile moments of their lives," Morrissey said. Canton Police Chief Kenneth Berkowitz, who also attended, said that his department responds to some problem at the Shawmut Road courthouse about once each week.

First Justice John Casey credited his predecessor, Judge Angela Ordonez, for initiating the pilot court security program, particularly in light of deadly incidents at similar courts across the country. He added that "District Attorney Morrissey has been great in terms of resources and assistance."

Chief Court Officer Patricia Bellotti sent five court officers to a two-day active shooter response training in 2013 that District Attorney Morrissey sponsored, primarily for Norfolk County school systems: the ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) Program. Following that initial training – which stresses preparing for several different potential responses rather than the static "lockdown" often used as a default in major incidents – ALICE was adopted by the Trial Court state-wide.

Morrissey also used drug forfeiture funds to obtain a full safety assessment and incident pre-plan for the courthouse from Metro LEC, the Metropolitan Law Enforcement Council. The safety assessment, like those Morrissey funded for one school in each of his communities, details staging areas, provides mapping and logistical information for first responders.

The court project also included establishing direct radio communications between the courts and local police departments, outfitting selected officers with body armor and other steps.

"I think it is laudable that Judge Ordonez, Judge Casey, Chief Bellotti, Register Pat McDermott and the trial court hierarchy have been progressive and open to addressing security shortfalls before they are exploited," District Attorney Morrissey said. "It is far preferable to come to the probate and family court today to mark this progress than to be responding here with Chief Berkowitz on the other side of a future tragedy. If this becomes the basis for more state-wide improvements, even better."