

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Aug. 24, 2018**

**Wilmington Community Court Initiative Launched with a  
Community Resource Center Fair at the Courthouse**

As a first step toward launching the Wilmington Community Court – a new kind of problem-solving court – the Delaware Judiciary, in cooperation with the City of Wilmington and other community partners, hosted the Community Resource Center Fair at the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center today. The event was designed to introduce the community to this new and innovative court initiative.

Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr., Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls, Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki, and Wilmington City Council President Hanifa Shabazz all spoke at the fair about their vision for the Wilmington Community Court and how it will improve the quality of life in the community.

“The one thing that most people who appear as defendants often need can be summed up in three letters: J-O-B. This new Community Resource Center, and the Wilmington Community Court that is now being formed, will help close a critical gap in the services and programs that the Courts currently offer low-level offenders,” said Chief Justice Strine. “Our goal is to help all participants get connected to the services they need to become self-sufficient, law-abiding citizens. And adding a ‘job court’ dimension to our existing focus on substance abuse and mental health treatment is a crucial objective of our Community Court initiative.”

“Our hope is that this Community Resource Center, and the Wilmington Community Court that the center will be a part of, will not only help our communities by resolving issues in our neighborhoods, but will also help the individuals that end up appearing in front of us by connecting them with the help they need. This help could be counseling or some other form of treatment, but in some cases it may be connecting them with a job opportunity or help finding a job, leading them to a more productive life,” said Chief Judge Smalls.

The Community Resource Center will be opening in September on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center in the Law Library. The agencies, service organizations, and groups participating in the Community Resource Center Fair on Friday will be operating out of the Resource Center and will be working hand-in-hand with the Community Court when it begins full operations.

The Wilmington Community Court will, among other things, handle low-level misdemeanor crimes and will rely less on fines and prison time and more on community service, employment programs and/or treatment programs. Thus, the Community Court will seek to address the underlying issues that are the driving factors behind defendants’ behavior that negatively affects the community. As important, the Community Court will be the

framework for the Judiciary's overall efforts to help defendants through its Problem-Solving Courts. Efforts will be made to coordinate the scheduling of the Problem-Solving Courts to make access more convenient to participants and more efficient for service providers. There should be "no wrong door," in order to make sure that participants in need, who come into any court, are identified and referred to important services vital to their rehabilitation. Consistent with this goal, Community Court will hopefully be open after hours one day a week so that participants can attend without missing work or, in the case of youth, school.

The orders handed down by judges in the Community Court could include referring individuals to various treatment programs, jobs programs or to housing or employment assistance. Those orders could also involve restorative justice resolutions, such as directing an individual convicted of vandalism to repair the damage they or others caused. Individual accountability will still be a key part of this court and the plan is to eventually take the Community Court statewide to assist other communities with their challenges.

"I look forward to working with the Delaware Judiciary to bring this innovative program to Wilmington," said Mayor Mike Purzycki. "There are a variety of issues or problems that cause citizens to become involved with the criminal justice system and a community court can focus on finding solutions that don't necessarily involve incarceration. This concept can change lives, and I am eager to support these efforts."

"The Community Court and Resource Center initiative is not only about second chances," said Council President Hanifa Shabazz. "This innovative program is about educating people who end up in front of a judge for minor infractions; the importance of accountability, and giving them immediate access to the tools available to redirect their steps along the path to a better life."

Friday's event was truly a community event with a Back-to-School theme that included the distribution of over 200 backpacks and drawstring bags filled with school supplies. The backpacks and drawstring bags were donated by fraternal organizations and others, and the school supplies were donated by individual community members and court personnel.

The groups, service providers, and agencies that had tables at Friday's event included: the Department of Justice; the Office of Defense Services; the Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families; Delaware 2-1-1; Wilmington Hope Commission; Wilmington Jobs Corps; APEX (Advancement through Pardon and Expungement); TASC (Treatment Access Service Center); Brandywine Counseling and Community Services; Pace; In Her Shoes, Inc.; the Food Bank of Delaware; Housing Alliance of Delaware; Catholic Charities, Child, Inc.; Goodwill; Back to School Drive; Rick Vanstory Resource Center and the Delaware Financial Literacy Institute.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator

Brenda Wise at 302-255-2109 or [Brenda.Wise@state.de.us](mailto:Brenda.Wise@state.de.us)