



## Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

# News

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### **Kanawha County launches domestic violence pilot program** For immediate release Friday, August 31, 2012

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Supreme Court Justice Robin Jean Davis and Kanawha County officials today announced the creation of a domestic violence pilot program in the county.

“Domestic violence is not just a family problem, it is the entire community’s problem,” Justice Davis told the crowd gathered in the courtroom of Chief Circuit Judge Louis H. “Duke” Bloom. “It is time to stop the senseless violence in our state.”

Justice Davis and Judge Bloom were joined by Kanawha County Circuit Judge Tod Kaufman, Kanawha County Family Court Judge Mike Kelly, Kanawha County Magistrate Julie Yeager, Supreme Court Family Courts Director Lisa Tackett, Kanawha County Managing Deputy Public Defender Diana Panucci, and Kanawha County Prosecutor Mark Plantz.

“The Supreme Court chose Kanawha County for this pilot project because of the volume of cases there and the quality and experience of the judicial officers who handle them. We have confidence that this will be a good place to try this innovative way of handling a challenging caseload,” Justice Davis said.



Justice Robin Jean Davis speaks at the launch of the domestic violence court pilot program in Kanawha County. She is joined by Chief Circuit Judge Louis H. “Duke” Bloom, Kanawha County Family Court Judge Mike Kelly, Kanawha County Magistrate Julie Yeager, and Supreme Court Family Courts Division Director Lisa Tackett.  
*Photo by Jennifer Bundy*



The Legislature early this year passed a law which allowed the Supreme Court to establish one pilot program in any jurisdiction. The Supreme Court chose Kanawha County and Judge Kelly, who will work with Magistrate Yeager. The two together will handle all domestic violence cases in the county. Intervening early and on a more regular basis should help save lives, judicial officials said.

“We know what the problem is,” said Judge Kelly. “This pilot project takes a different approach to fighting domestic violence. This project is community based. Everybody recognized we needed to step up our efforts and

do this project.”

The pilot project will last four years, at the end of which a report will be given to the Speaker of the House and the Senate President.

“It’s a wonderful cooperative effort to address this important issue that comes before the circuit courts, family courts, and magistrates courts in Kanawha County,” Judge Bloom said.

“It’s a wonderful day to be here and explain all the hard work we have put into this and the reasons for it,” said Magistrate Yeager. “It is a trial, and we are ready to get this going and perhaps help other courts throughout the state to help other magistrates and family court judges.”

“Today represents the recognition by the Supreme Court and all the divisions of court in this county how important this issue is to everybody, how it cuts across all lines, how the equal treatment of people that come before the bench on those matters is dispensed,” said Judge Kaufman. “The old way wasn’t effective in what we wanted to do with domestic violence. To put this in one court is going to benefit the people that need dispute resolution the most.”

“This is a project that has been years in the making,” said Director Tackett. “We have very dedicated judges, advocates, prosecutors, and law enforcement. This project took on a life of its own. It’s been an effort across all branches of state government to get this project going. I believe we have the right people in place to make this possible.”

“I want to thank everyone involved in this project for letting us be involved in the planning stages and giving our input,” said Ms. Panucci. “We look forward to being part of this system, providing great representation to our clients, and doing what we can to make this transition as smooth as possible.”

“This is a long time coming, it’s absolutely the right decision and I couldn’t be more supportive of it,” said Mr. Plantz. “This is not a step in the right direction, this is a monumental leap.”

“I don’t know if this (court) is the answer, but we are going to give it a one thousand percent try. We are going to learn from it and build a court system we can all be proud of,” said Judge Kelly.

The text of Enrolled House Bill 4648 can be found on the Legislature’s website at [http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill\\_Text\\_HTML/2012\\_SESSIONS/RS/pdf\\_bills/HB4648%20ENR%20PRINTED.pdf](http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Text_HTML/2012_SESSIONS/RS/pdf_bills/HB4648%20ENR%20PRINTED.pdf).