

SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
Essex Vicinage

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News Release

For Immediate Release Dec. 5, 2007

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Chief Justice Stuart Rabner to Speak at Essex Drug Court Commencement Ceremony

Chief Justice Stuart Rabner will offer remarks at the 17th graduation and commencement ceremony of the Essex Vicinage Adult Drug Court on Thursday, Dec. 6. The event will take place in the J. Harry Smith Hall at Essex County College, 303 University Avenue, at 12:30 p.m. This is the first time a New Jersey chief justice will be attending a drug court commencement ceremony.

Criminal Division Presiding Judge Donald J. Volkert Jr., the outgoing drug court judge, will host the event. Newark Mayor Cory Booker will deliver the keynote address. In addition to family and friends of the graduates and commencers, members of the public are invited to join the celebration.

Essex and Camden Counties were the first in the state to have adult drug courts, first accepting participants in 1996. Since then, drug courts have expanded and each county in New Jersey now has an adult drug court. The goal of drug court is to reduce crime while assisting non-violent drug-addicted offenders with rehabilitation. Statewide, drug courts in New Jersey have already helped more than 7,300 people. Ninety-three percent were employed upon graduation and 52 percent had valid driver's licenses. More than 2,900 participants are enrolled in drug court programs around the state.

Drug courts are a highly specialized team process with judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation, corrections officers and rehabilitation and treatment providers all working together. Participants appear regularly before a Superior Court judge and are required to undergo frequent drug testing, obtain jobs, pay their fines and support their families. They are intensely supervised by specially trained probation officers.

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Drug court targets offenders who, were it not for their substance abuse, may never have been involved with the court system. Drug court programs are rigorous, requiring completion of four phases during five years of intensive drug and alcohol treatment and testing, and a tightly structured regimen of treatment and recovery services. This level of supervision permits the program to support the recovery process, but also allows supervisors to react swiftly to impose appropriate therapeutic sanctions or to reinstate criminal proceedings when participants cannot comply with the program.

Judge Siobhan A. Teare currently presides over the Essex Vicinage Drug Court, which is now in its eleventh year. The program has 250 active participants; in addition, 132 participants have completed the full five-year program. On Thursday two more participants will graduate from the five-year program.

Participants who reach commencement have been in the program a minimum of 18 months and have made significant progress in meeting the goals of drug court. More than 25 participants will receive certificates marking their completion of Phase III of the program. They will move onto the final phase, continuing treatment and undergoing random drug testing. They will serve as positive role models for participants in Phase I and Phase II. This rigorous approach offers addicted offenders the best opportunity to remain drug free.

The commencement ceremony and celebration will include speakers from the court system, the keynote address and commentary from the graduates. The ceremony will be followed by a reception.

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