



Chatham County Board of Commissioners

124 Bull Street, Savannah, GA 31401

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 9, 2022

Chatham County to Receive Training and Technical Assistance to Start a Peer Court

Chatham County, GA (March 9, 2022) – Through the J. W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, a Public Service and Outreach unit at the University of Georgia, the Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire and Chatham County Juvenile Court will receive training and technical assistance to start a Peer Court in Chatham County. The program is slated to kick off in a pilot program in Fall of this year.

Commissioner Aaron “Adot” Whitely stated, “Peer court is a diversion option, an opportunity to engage our youth, and a positive and voluntary interaction with the criminal justice system. I’m excited that Chatham County will be one of 16 communities in the state to offer this program. I’m honored to work with Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire, who will be the primary facilitator of this program. I thank Juvenile Court and student Henry Moss for their support and efforts in establishing Teen Court. I’m so proud to be a part of this initiative and I hope this program will become a fruitful addition to our community’s toolbox.”

Peer Court is a diversionary program for youth who have been charged with a misdemeanor offense for the first time. Instead of appearing in Juvenile Court, the youth will appear at a disposition hearing administered by trained youth volunteers. Benefits of the program include reduced recidivism, youth leadership, rapid response, positive peer pressure, and cost effectiveness.

“The Juvenile Court is excited to support the development of Peer Courts. We can’t fully address juvenile delinquency without providing positive alternative opportunities. Engaging young people, especially those considered at-risk, is an effective diversion and makes a real difference. This opportunity would not exist without the efforts of Commissioner Whitely, the Fanning Institute at UGA, a student advocate, Henry Moss, The Savannah-Chatham County

School System, and Jill Cheeks, the Director of the Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire,” says Judge Thomas L. Cole, Presiding Judge of Chatham County Juvenile Court.

Collaborators on the project will spend the next few months working with stakeholders to develop the program and implement a pilot program in the Fall.

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