



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System
Hon. Gerald Connolly
Administrative Judge
Third Judicial District**

**Contact:
Amelia Lepore Sessions
Deputy District Executive
amlepore@nycourts.gov**

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Specially Designated Waiting Area for Foster Youth Unveiled at Albany County Family Courthouse

ALBANY, NEW YORK—Administrative Judge Gerald Connolly and Supervising Judge of the Family Courts for the Third Judicial District Richard Rivera today announced the opening of a dedicated waiting area in the Albany County Family Court for youngsters who have been removed from their homes due to child abuse or neglect. The opening was marked by a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by court staff, representatives from the Albany County Executive's office, and numerous partner agencies. The new waiting area was made possible with the support of grant funds provided by the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children.

The brightly colored new space resembles a cozy living room, with comfortable seating, rugs, curtains, electronic games, reading space and even healthy snacks. It is located away from the crowded, hectic and sometimes fractious waiting area used by parents, their attorneys and other adults involved in child-protective proceedings.

The law requires that as time progresses, the goal of working with parents to return youngsters to their homes must be balanced against the need for permanency for the children. To this end, children ages seven and older are offered the opportunity, generally every six months, to speak with the judge on issues related to their placement in foster care and their wishes going forward. The new waiting area was created for youngsters as they wait to meet with the Family Court judge or an attorney referee to discuss such issues.

“Judge Connolly and I are so pleased to inaugurate this thoughtfully designed waiting area within the Albany County Family Court, which will provide a welcoming, relaxing atmosphere for foster youth coming to court,” said Judge Rivera.

“The idea behind this beautiful, colorful and playful new space is to engage these youngsters and also put them at ease during their waiting time at the courthouse, said Albany County Family Court Judge Susan Kushner, who serves as the lead judge for the County’s Court Improvement Project, a federally funded initiative that supports the Family Court’s mandate to promote the safety, permanency and well-being of abused and neglected children.

This project is the culmination of three years’ work. We are grateful to have received approximately \$15,000 in grant money to fund the initiative. We are also thankful for the assistance and cooperation of County Executive Dan McCoy, who was instrumental in providing space in our courthouse for this purpose, and to the Albany Community Action Partnership (ACAP), the Red Shelf Book Club and the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), in addition to other private individuals for donating games and hundreds of books for browsing and for youth to take home.”

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