



PRESS RELEASE

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PARENTS GAIN A SECOND CHANCE AT FAMILY THROUGH INNOVATIVE CPS SPECIALTY COURTS

BEXAR COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT AND FAMILY DRUG COURT TO HOST A VIRTUAL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY THIS FRIDAY

San Antonio, Texas—The Bexar County Children’s Courts will host a commencement ceremony for local families graduating from Bexar County’s Early Childhood Court and Family Drug Court. The Bexar County Family Drug Court was established in 2003 by then 225th District Court Judge, John Specia. Its mission is to provide services to families separated by the effects of alcohol and drug abuse and to use the power of the Courts to bring the community together, helping parents to recover from addiction, and to appropriately care for their children. The Bexar County Early Childhood Court was established in 2015 by 225th District Court Judge, Peter Sakai. Its mission is to establish a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated systems approach to help families with young children within the community. This includes developing, supporting and facilitating services and tailoring those to the needs of the child(ren) and family. Previously, these courts were under the direction and supervision of retired Judge Peter Sakai of the 225th District Court. Since his retirement from the bench, Judge Monique Diaz of the 150th District Court has stepped in to preside over these dockets.

Judge Diaz states: “These courts take a trauma-informed and holistic approach to helping families heal through our justice system. For the first time, many of these parents who have experienced hardship and trauma of their own are asked “what happened to you, and how can we help you?” rather than “what’s wrong with you, and how should we punish you?” It is through our innovation and collaboration with community stakeholders that families obtain healing, have their basic needs met, learn parenting skills, and build support systems that lead to reunified and stronger families.”

One graduate of the Family Drug Court stated the following on his family’s experience: “When my wife and I needed help with getting our lives together back to safety for our children, we



were accepted into the Family Drug Court program with the utmost attention to our personal needs as well as our children's needs. We have been guided with that attention through the services and program with sincerity and sensitivity. Family Drug Court is made up of countless professionals working together to foster growth, safety, and change that has helped us regain control of our lives and become successful in our lives and in parenthood."

A graduate of the Early Childhood Court had this to say about her experience with the program: "Through Early Childhood Court, not only was I provided with the tools, resources and the support to become better parents, but also a regained faith in myself and "the system." I have learned no matter what happens in my life, I can handle it by looking within, using appropriate grounding skills, and utilizing the support system that I have built. I'm now the mother my son and family deserves!"

Early Childhood Court Manager, Lorena Medellin, LCSW stated the following: "We are extremely proud of all of the hard work our participants have done to build back the trust within their families! All of our families have children ages 0-5 and have engaged in services that have allowed them to gain increased knowledge in parenting, assistance with sobriety and/or healthy family dynamics. It has been a privilege to see how much each individual has grown individually and within their family unit."

The commencement ceremony will take place via **ZOOM ID: 993 1157 3656** this **Friday, June 10th at 9:00 A.M.** Opening and closing prayers will be administered by Pastor Jimmy Robles, of Last Chance Ministries, a former drug dealer turned pastor. Special remarks will be provided by Josey Garcia, a former foster child turned youth advocate, mentor and community leader. Opening remarks will be given by retired Judge Peter Sakai of the 225th District Court. Judge Monique Diaz will also be speaking, along with Associate CPS Judge Kimberly Burley, who will begin co-presiding over the Early Childhood Court, and Associate CPS Judge Raul Perales, who will begin co-presiding over the Family Drug Court.

Judge Monique Diaz was elected to the bench in November of 2018 and presides over the 150th Civil District Court in Bexar County, Texas. She currently serves as Co-Chair of the Collaborative Commission on Domestic Violence, is a member of the Bexar County Juvenile Board, and is the current presiding judge over the Early Childhood Court and Family Drug Court. Judge Kimberly Burley is a Children's Court Associate Judge appointed to the bench last year. She is a former Assistant Bexar County District Attorney of 23 years and the first African



American and first woman to receive an appointment to this bench. Judge Raul Perales is a Children's Court Associate Judge presiding over Bexar County's newest CPS Court with a concentration in family violence. Judge Perales was appointed this year after owning and managing his own child welfare and advocacy law practice and working as an Assistant Bexar County District Attorney. Judge Peter Sakai was first appointed as an Associate Judge to the Bexar County Children's Court in 1995. He was then elected to the 225th District Court in 2006 where he presided until his retirement in 2021.

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