

Judge Hudson appointed to assist Youth Courts statewide

April 9, 2015 — One of Mississippi’s most experienced juvenile court judges has become an adviser to Youth Courts statewide.

John N. Hudson of Natchez, who retired in December after 31 years as Adams County Court and Youth Court Judge, became Jurist in Residence April 1. His job is to assist Youth Courts across the state in dealing with abused, neglected and delinquent children.

“I will be a resource person for all Youth Court judges,” he said.

“The purpose is to help bring some uniform practices to the way children are treated in the courts throughout the state,” Judge Hudson said. “My priority is to be a resource to help local Youth Courts become more effective and efficient.”



It is hoped that the Jurist in Residence can assist Youth Courts to achieve quicker permanency for children who come into the custody of the Department of Human Services, and to ensure better outcomes for children.

Judge Hudson hopes to serve as a mentor, help with training in best practices, and to locate and access community and other resources to assist Youth Courts.

The Jurist in Residence position is patterned after a similar program created by the Texas Supreme Court to assist its juvenile courts. Judge Hudson will visit a Texas Jurist in Residence in May to learn more about that state’s program. “I’m a firm believer in replicating things that work instead of wasting a lot of time and creating things that may or may not work,” he said.

Mississippi’s Youth Court structure, staffing and resources vary greatly across the state. In the 21 counties which have a County Court, those judges oversee the Youth Court. The Chancery Courts have jurisdiction over Youth Court in 61 counties which do not have a County Court. Chancellors appoint local attorneys as part-time Youth Court referees to preside over Youth Court matters.

Rankin County Court and Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome, Chairman of the Council of Youth Court Judges, said having the Jurist in Residence “will be an excellent opportunity to get some expertise developed in areas of the state which may be lacking.”

The position of Jurist in Residence was created on the recommendation of the Commission on Children’s Justice, which Judge Broome co-chaired with Supreme Court Justice Randy Pierce. The Commission’s December 2013 report called for, among other things, establishment of a state position of Resident Jurist to assist the Mississippi Supreme Court in performing its supervisory role with respect to effective administration of justice in Youth Courts, serve as a liaison to the Department of Human Services and other state agencies involved in child protection, and provide training to Youth Court judges.

Justice Pierce said, “I am extremely pleased that Judge Hudson will be Mississippi’s first Jurist in Resi-

dence.... Judge Hudson will be an asset to our Youth Courts and to the Supreme Court as we ensure the best possible outcomes for Mississippi's children. I also want to thank Casey Family Programs for funding this position for a year and for Casey's commitment to our children.”

Seattle-based Casey Family Programs has committed to provide \$60,000 to fund the Mississippi Jurist in Residence position for a year, with the expectation of providing future funding. Casey Family Programs is the nation’s largest private foundation focused entirely on foster care and improving the child welfare system.

Isabel Blanco of Miami, senior director and lead strategic consultant for Casey Family Programs in Mississippi, said, “Certainly our intent is to have a longer support for this capacity. Our intent is to continue to support what we feel is a very strong strategy.”

Blanco said Judge Hudson’s extensive work in the past on juvenile justice improvement initiatives makes him ideally suited to become the state’s first Jurist in Residence. He has extensive experience and is well respected. “He is an invaluable resource,” she said.

Judge Hudson has been a leader and innovator in Youth Court reform. On the state level, he played a significant role in the expansion of community services to meet the educational, emotional and physical needs of delinquent, abused and neglected children in the community and in the improvement of the juvenile justice systems. In Natchez, he developed one of the first five adolescent offender programs in Mississippi, the first juvenile drug court in the state, one of the two first family drug courts, a regional family first resource center providing parenting and character resources to children and their families, a GED program located in the youth court building for individuals involved in the court system, a Court Appointed Special Advocacy, CASA, program for abused and neglected children, and provisions for educational instruction of youth in detention.

He served as chair of the Mississippi Council of Youth Court Judges 1993-2000, and as legislative liaison for the Council 2000 through 2014. Recently, he led efforts to develop alternatives to detention for juveniles including a local community service program, intensive supervision and GPS tracking. He served as chair of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Task Force for the state of Mississippi. The task force developed alternatives to detention for juveniles statewide and developed licensing standards for all juvenile detention centers to ensure that detained youth are held in appropriate facilities.

At Jefferson Street United Methodist Church, he has served as coordinator of youth for more than 30 years, helping to develop a full annual program of spiritual development, missions and fellowship. He is state coordinator for United Methodist youth ministry. He volunteers at Habitat for Humanity, the Community Stew Pot and other local and national philanthropic organizations particularly associated with children and youth.

Judge Hudson earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and law degree from the University of Mississippi. He practiced law in Natchez from 1975 until 1983, serving as public defender and city prosecutor as well as a trustee in U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

In July 1983, Governor William Winter appointed him to serve as Adams County Court Judge. He retired from the County Court bench in December 2014.

Judge Hudson is a lifelong resident of Natchez. He will continue to live in Natchez, but will travel and visit courts across the state in his new job as Jurist in Residence.