

The Court Reporter

[A Message from Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio](#)

Two acknowledgements were rendered to this Juvenile Court recently that I hope underscores that the work we do here is devoted to implementing best practices and better outcomes for the youth and families we serve.

The re-certification of the Detention Center by the American Correctional Association (ACA) was awarded after an extensive evaluation of every element of its operation. It was particularly heartening to learn of the ACA auditor's impressions of Detention Center staff and its Superintendent, Melissa Gerney. I couldn't agree more with them.

It was also heartening to learn that the Ohio State Bar Association recognized the good work done by our Multidisciplinary Representation Team (MRT) staff with its Innovative Court Programs and Practices Award. The core purpose of the program is to reunite parents with their children after losing custody. As a pilot program launched at the Court in 2021, the MRT method proved to be effective, and in a relatively short period of time has achieved a very respectable success rate in bringing families back together. This award is shared by the parent advocates and community partners who are so integral to the success of the program.

It bears repeating that when a segment of Court operations is recognized, it is indicative of the work done every day by every staff



Judge Teodosio



Linda Tucci Teodosio

[Juvenile Court Detention Center Recertified by ACA](#)

The Summit County Juvenile Court's Detention Center received its third re-accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA). The ACA is nationally and internationally recognized as the standard-bearer for best practices in corrections. The Court received its first ACA accreditation in 2015. Representatives of the Court, Detention Superintendent Melissa Gerney, Special Projects Administrator Lisa DiSabato-Moore, and Detention Supervisor Katherine Good received the accreditation certificate in Nashville in late August.



From left, Katherine Good, Melissa Gerney, and Lisa DiSabato-Moore with the accreditation certificate awarded the Juvenile Court's Detention Center by the American Correctional Association in Nashville.

The recertification is the final facet of the process that began in April when ACA auditors Larry Gallagher, Bonnie Holley, and Chairperson Ruben Reyes visited the Detention Center over a three-day period. They conducted interviews with staff members and examined the Detention Center's compliance with ACA standards. When the audit was completed, the ACA representatives met with members of the Court staff led by Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio to deliver their findings.

There were two sets of standards advanced by the ACA, one with 31 standards, the other, a more exhaustive 392 standards. The auditors noted that 377 of those standards were applicable to the Detention Center. For the first set of standards, the auditors revealed the Detention Center was in 100% compliance. For the second set of standards, the result was the same: 100% compliance.

Chairperson Reyes indicated how professional he and his colleagues found Court staff, from third shift in Detention to Court administration. He admired the sense of teamwork in Detention. He observed how well Detention Officers interacted with an unruly youth and de-escalating the situation. He believed the youth in Detention were safe and cared for in their units. He pointed to how

well data for the Court was so accessible and user-friendly. The auditors were also impressed with the programming in place. Reyes had particular praise for Detention Superintendent Melissa Gerney.

"In watching you work with staff, we found you focused, fearless, and a fixer," Reyes stated. "You are a class act running a classy facility. We wondered how we could let you know how much we appreciate the work you've done here, so we decided on this." And with that, the three auditors rose from their seats to give Melissa Gerney a standing ovation. Her colleagues did the same.

The auditors then turned their attention to Judge Teodosio.

Said Reyes, "It starts at the top. We have seen what you have done with this Court. You set the tone and I can tell you, the admiration you have from your staff is real."

Judge Teodosio responded by saying, "It is always good to have an objective point of view, another set of eyes, if you will, observing how we work here. I am so proud of my staff. I know they worked hard to prepare for the audit, but they work hard all the time."

"Judge Teodosio," said, Reyes, "I am confident that in 100 years your name will still be mentioned for all the work you have done with this Court."

When the representatives of the Court went to Nashville for the final summary, they found that the examination of the Detention Center mirrored the words of the auditors.

The summary stated, "Through careful review, planning, scrutiny, and the many initiatives implemented by the Summit County Juvenile Court under the direction of nationally recognized Juvenile Court Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio, the facility strives to serve only those youth it needs to, and only for as long as they need to be served."

The summary outlined the audit of every facet of Detention Center operations: academics, environmental conditions, fire safety, food service, library access, medical care, records, recreation, religious programming, sanitation, security, social services, and visitation. Each area was considered equal to ACA standards.

The summary concluded by offering, "The facility has a core group of experienced veteran staff that are depended upon, and unselfishly go above and beyond to support the program."

[Court Program Earns Statewide Award](#)

In late September, the Summit County Juvenile Court's Multidisciplinary Representation Team (MRT) program was the recipient of the Innovative Court Programs and Practices Award at the Ohio Judicial Conference Meeting in Columbus

The award, sponsored by the Ohio Bar Judicial Administration and Innovation Committee, seeks to highlight and bring greater visibility to exemplary programs in Ohio's courts and to facilitate the transfer of those programs to other jurisdictions. Award submissions are evaluated on criteria including creativity, the newness of the program, its effectiveness and whether the program addresses significant issues that are regional in scope.

The Court's Multidisciplinary Representation Team provides support and wrap-around services to parents who have lost custody of their children with an ultimate goal of safe and timely family reunification or permanency.



Court staff, from left, Joseph Baglieri, Woody Tyrrell, Dawn Greathouse, Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio with Ohio State Bar Association President Dan Griffith after the Court's MRT Program received the Innovative Court Programs and Practices Award.

The project began as a pilot program in 2021 with support from the Supreme Court of Ohio. The Court was the first to implement the MRT method and now many other counties have successfully adopted the same approach, including Clark, Cuyahoga, Erie, Stark, and Wayne counties.

MRT includes a social worker, parent advocate and a defense lawyer, all of whom are working together to help parents navigate the legal system and get the support they need to have the best chance of getting their kids back. This can include substance abuse and mental health treatment, parenting classes as well as access to housing, transportation and employment services — all to provide a safer, more stable environment for the children and a fresh start for the parents.

Under Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio's leadership, the MRT staff have achieved a 58% success rate among

those who have gone through the program. That represents 28 children returned to their homes and 14 additional children in kinship care, meaning they remained with family and were not placed in long-term foster care.

"Not only does Judge Teodosio's team approach mean better outcomes for families and children, but it also saves taxpayers in the long run with fewer kids going into the foster care system," Ohio Bar Association President Dan Griffith said. "This program is also innovative in the way inspires an important cultural shift, moving away from the perceived adversarial nature of custody cases into that of a supportive team atmosphere. That helps increase confidence in our courts overall."

Judge Teodosio was accompanied to the podium by staff members Joseph Baglieri, Dawn Greathouse, and Woody Tyrrell.

"These people with me are the ones, along with James Warner, who really put this program in motion," she said. "I must also recognize the parent advocates that are so pivotal to the success of the program. The Ohio Supreme Court has also been vital to the creation of the MRT program with its support and guidance."