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AJA and NCSC Work Together Against Substance Abuse

Every day our courts confront issues of substance abuse in a variety of faces and cases. The American Judges Association and the National Center for State Courts, with funding from the State Justice Institute, have produced a new curriculum to help judges confront these issues—"Judicial Education on Substance Abuse: Promoting and Expanding Judicial Awareness and Leadership." The curriculum also represents the collaborative efforts of other national organizations.

"Judicial Education on Substance Abuse" explores the nature of alcohol and other drug abuse, as well as the dynamics of recovery in the court context. It is an introductory session for judges who handle all case types and is adaptable (and expandable) for various educational contexts at the national, state, and local

levels. The curriculum encourages judges in all types of courts to share current information and work with experts in other disciplines to develop new systemic approaches to address this challenging problem.

The curriculum consists of three standalone modules focused on increasing judicial awareness of the challenges substance abuse poses to the courts, individuals, and the community; providing a basic overview of addiction, pharmacology, and recovery principles; and exploring strategies and tools judges can use from the bench to respond more effectively to substance abuse.

For more information, log on to NCSC's Web site at www.ncsconline.org and click on "What's New," or contact Denise Dancy at the National Center for State Courts by phone at (757) 259-1593 or by e-mail at ddancy@ncsc.dni.us. 

Kentucky Says "Yes" to Family Courts

On November 8, 2002, Kentuckians made a historic decision. By ballot, they informed their government that they believe Kentucky should amend the state's constitution to initiate family courts.

The general election ballot in Kentucky asked voters: "Are you in favor of Family Courts in Kentucky by amending the Kentucky Constitution to allow the Supreme Court to designate a division of circuit court as a Family Court?" Voters overwhelmingly supported the amendment, with 76 percent voting yes and 24 percent voting no.

For ten years, Kentucky operated a family court pilot project in a handful of locations. There was a question, however, as to the constitutionality of the family courts, and many believed that the courts should not be expanded statewide until the state constitution could be amended to provide for them.

According to Chief Justice Joseph E. Lambert of Kentucky, there is a lesson to be learned. "Citizens want improved courts, and when they are properly educated, respond enthusiastically."

Virtually all major newspapers in Kentucky endorsed the amendment before the election, and it was passed overwhelmingly in both houses of the Kentucky General

Assembly. The amendment also received the support of the Kentucky Education Association, the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, the Kentucky State AFL-CIO, the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, the Jefferson County Teachers Association, several Kentucky chapters of the NAACP, any many other organizations.

In an op-ed piece published by several Kentucky newspapers, Chief Justice Lambert wrote, "Where court involvement in family matters is necessary, courts should do more than merely decide who wins and who loses. With dedicated judges, competent and well-trained support staff, and helping professionals, family courts are making an otherwise dreadful ordeal a survivable experience."

For more information on family courts, the National Center for State Courts recommends the following publications, both available online at www.ncsconline.org.

- *How Are Courts Coordinating Family Cases?* by Carol R. Flango, Victor E. Flango, and H. Ted Rubin
- *Integrating Criminal and Civil Matters in Family Courts: Performance Areas and Recommendations*, by Brenda Uekert 