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Court Announces 2016 Advocate for Justice Award To Superior Court Justice Nancy Mills.

December 29, 2016. For Immediate Release, Portland Maine. Chief Justice Leigh I. Saufley today announced that Superior Court Justice Nancy Mills, of Cornville, has received *the 2016 Advocate For Justice Award*. The Judicial Branch awards the Advocate For Justice Award annually to that person who has most effectively championed the cause of justice in our society.

Justice Mills is a 1982 graduate of the University of Maine School of Law. After several years in private practice, she was appointed to Maine's District Court in 1991 and the Maine Superior Court in 1993, where she served for three years as the Chief Justice of the Superior Court and she continues to serve on the Superior Court today.

In recognizing Justice Mills, the Judicial Branch Performance Council - the awards review panel - noted that many worthy nominations were received for this award, but Justice Mills stood out: "As a trial judge Justice Mills has presided over some of the most high profile criminal and civil trials in the state with a respect for the rights of the parties and victims, as well as for the public and the media's interest in the proceedings. She has a great ability to efficiently manage the many cases assigned to her, eliminate delays, and yet assure that all have had their "day in court." She instills a respect for justice in every proceeding over which she presides."

In presenting the award to Justice Mills, Chief Justice Saufley indicated that Justice Mills has made a significant difference in the delivery of justice, particularly in criminal cases, through the development of two important problem-solving courts: The Co-Occurring Disorder Court and the Veterans Court. Through her consistent commitment to those courts, Justice Mills has created a model for others to follow. The creation of those courts has made it possible for even the most serious offenders, those who are willing to work hard, accept responsibility, and follow through with treatment, to turn their lives around."

In 2005 Justice Mills, in collaboration with the Kennebec and Somerset County District Attorney's Office and treatment providers, created the Co-Occurring Disorders Court ("CODC"). This court provides intensive judicial monitoring, case management, specialized treatment and other services to criminal defendants who have both serious substance abuse *and* mental illness, and

who have committed serious criminal offenses. As a result, the participants are some of the most challenging defendants in the criminal justice system. Participating defendants meet weekly with the judge, probation officers and substance abuse and mental health service providers, with the goal of holding defendants accountable for their crimes while helping the defendants to improve their mental health, as well as reducing future criminal behaviors. Minimum participation is one year, with most participants averaging between 18-23 months before "graduating."

In early 2011, Justice Mills added a separate veterans track to the CODC. Justice Mills worked closely with the local veterans hospital and the Veterans Administration to insure that each participant had the resources necessary to succeed. This was one of the first veterans' courts in New England. Each participant in the Veterans' Court has a veteran mentor. As in the CODC, all participants have serious substance abuse, often a mental health diagnosis, and have been charged with serious felonies. This very recent, 2-part news report, which interviews participating defendants, the District Attorney and others involved, identifies Justice Mills' critical role and contribution to the success of the Veterans Court:

<https://wabi.tv/2016/05/18/courtroom-success-in-central-maine-part-1/>

<https://wabi.tv/2016/05/19/courtroom-success-in-central-maine-part-2/>

See also:

<http://www.pressherald.com/2015/03/23/north-pond-hermit-completes-specialty-court-program/>

<http://www.centralmaine.com/2015/01/12/kennebec-specialty-court-program-graduates-14/>

In conferring the award, Chief Justice Saufley observed that, "Justice Mills has been a leader and an innovator. She has inspired both the defendants and the participants in these specialty courts to believe that change is possible and to make those changes happen. We can all take a lesson from her work"

This past year, after many years of dedicated service to these two courts, Justice Mills has transitioned out of the weekly management of these two courts, but has taken on the task of overseeing all of the specialty courts in Maine as chairman of the Statewide Drug Courts Steering Committee, while maintaining her regular trial duties on the Superior Court. Chief Justice Saufley said: "For the new judges coming into these courts, she leaves an extremely successful court model to follow. Justice Mills is a model for all state court trial judges: her hard work, relentless dedication, intellect, innovation, compassion and judicial temperament all combine to make her a most worthy recipient of the *2016 Advocate For Justice Award*."

More information on the CODC and the Veterans Court can be found at:

http://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/drug/codvc.html

Annual reports for Maine's Drug Treatment Courts can be found at:

http://www.courts.maine.gov/reports_pubs/reports/index.html

