
DEBORAH SILVERMAN KATZ
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Camden Vicinage to Hold Drug Court Graduation

The Camden Vicinage will celebrate a record 21 graduates from its drug court program on Tuesday, June 23 at 2 p.m. in the Ceremonial Courtroom at the Hall of Justice, 101 South 5th St., Camden. Graduates will be awarded certificates marking their successful completion of the final phase of a rigorous program of substance abuse treatment and intensive supervision.

Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz will address graduates, family, friends and supporters. Criminal Presiding Judge Edward J. McBride Jr., who leads the drug court team, will officiate. The keynote speaker will be Michael DeLeon, founder of Steered Straight, a non-profit organization that teaches youth and adults about the consequences of making poor life choices.

The Camden Vicinage has had a drug court program since 1996. Along with the Essex Vicinage, it was the first voluntary drug court program in New Jersey.

Drug courts are a highly-specialized team process that functions within the existing Superior Court structure to address nonviolent drug related cases. They are unique in the criminal justice environment because they build a close collaborative relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment professionals. Within a cooperative courtroom atmosphere, the judge heads a team of court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, and treatment counselors who work together to support and monitor a participant's recovery

The most recent statistics provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts show that since the statewide program began in 2002, more than 3,700 participants have graduated, more than 80 percent were employed at the time of graduation, only 16 percent of graduates were arrested again after graduation, and only 3 percent were sentenced to state prison on a new conviction.

As of May 2015, 325 participants have graduated from the Camden Vicinage's drug court program.

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