

Franklin County Municipal Court



PRESS RELEASE

April 11, 2025

Two Municipal Court Employees Nationally Recognized for Excellence

Two Franklin County Municipal Court employees have been nationally recognized for excellence—one that guides women leaving the sex trade through a restorative justice program which also offers healing, and another employee, whose work fighting for justice equity has spurred national replication of a court program, helping thousands.

Gwen England is the Program Leader for the [CATCH Court](#), which is a diversionary docket focused on robust programming, treatment, and intensive, yet supportive, court supervision for women who have experienced a cycle of abuse while being victims of human trafficking.

Under the direction of [CATCH Court Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas](#), England has helped guide defendants toward recovery and avoid a combined 100 years of jail time. She is also an author, researcher with the University of Cincinnati focusing on “illuminating the experiences of those in the sex trade,” and is obtaining her second master’s degree.

The SOAP Project (“Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution”) is a nationwide organization that unites in the fight against human trafficking. England was given the [Liberator Award on March 29, 2025](#), at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church Banquet Hall.

As part of their work, the SOAP Project educates the public on how three-quarters of women involved in the sex trades were forced into service as children and suffered extensive traumas, making it a herculean task to escape.

Since 2013, the CATCH Court has graduated 366 participants, with about 60 percent of participants having no new offenses two years after graduation.

England is the second Franklin County Municipal Court employee to receive national recognition within weeks.

Robert Southers, director of the [Franklin County Municipal Court’s Self Help Center and Dispute Resolution Department](#), was honored with a resolution by the Columbus City Council for being awarded the 2025 Alli Gerkman Legal Visionary Award winner.

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The award, from the Advancement of the American Legal System, was for being “a transformative force in Ohio’s legal community. Under his leadership, the center has expanded its services” and “have helped tens of thousands of individuals access user-friendly legal resources and achieve fair outcomes, regardless of their financial means.”

The Self Help Center assists unrepresented civil litigants and takes walk-in appointments only Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on the 16 floor of the Municipal Court, 375 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio. The center is staffed with attorneys who help individuals represent themselves in court.

In its recognition of Robert Southers, Columbus City Council highlighted how the center began serving 732 people in 2017 and now assists more than 30,000 people annually. Southers became the director a year after it opened.

To read more details about this award, [click here.](#)

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