

Contact: Beth S. Riggert
Communications Counsel
Supreme Court of Missouri
(573) 751-3676

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 24 July 2017

**SUPREME COURT OF MISSOURI RECOGNIZES 31st JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
FOR SUCCESSFULLY HOLDING TIMELY HEARINGS**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – On behalf of the 31st Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Court Administrator Bill Prince accepted the Permanency Award, presented this morning by Supreme Court of Missouri Judge W. Brent Powell during a special ceremony at the Greene County Judicial Courts Facility in Springfield. This is the fourth time the 31st circuit, which includes Greene County, has received the Permanency Award.

The Permanency Award recognizes circuits for their excellence in service to children and families. Award recipients achieved standards for timely hearings in fiscal 2016 in child abuse and neglect cases in which children removed from their homes are to be reunited with their families or are to be placed in another permanent home as soon as possible.

“Protecting and ensuring stability for Missouri children who are brought into our judicial system must be a priority for courts.” Powell said in presenting the award. “As a former trial judge, I saw first-hand children come into my courtroom through no fault of their own because they had been abused or neglected. They needed the court to place them in a safe, stable and permanent home as quickly as possible.

“This award, now celebrating its 12th year, is a testament to the leadership and hard work of judges, juvenile officers, clerks, children’s division workers, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and other support staff who work every day to protect and ensure stability for children who suffer from abuse and neglect,” Powell said. In the years since the Court instituted the awards, the timeliness of hearings throughout the state has increased by an average of 5 percent even while the number of required hearings has increased 39 percent. Of the more than 52,500 required hearings held in the last fiscal year, 97 percent were held on time. The 31st circuit was one of an increasing number of circuits holding 100 percent of hearings on time.

The hearing time frames apply to six types of hearings and vary depending on the type of hearing. For example, when a child is taken into protective custody, an initial hearing must be held within three business days, the allegations must be proven within 60 days, and a disposition entered within 90 days. If the child remains in protective custody, the court must hold periodic reviews until the child is reunited with its natural parents, is adopted or another permanent placement is made. These time frames were developed based on recommendations from the Commission on Children’s Justice.

In evaluating what circuits qualify for the permanency awards, the circuits first were placed in size classes based on the total number of hearings that were due to be held during a particular time period. A circuit then had to achieve either 100 percent timeliness each quarter or an average of 100 percent annually to qualify. The 31st circuit is one of 19 judicial circuits to receive the award for fiscal 2016.

###