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**SUPREME COURT OF MISSOURI RECOGNIZES 31ST JUDICIAL
CIRCUIT FOR TIMELY PROCESSING CASES, INCLUDING
THOSE IMPACTING CHILDREN**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Supreme Court of Missouri has recognized the 31st Judicial Circuit (Greene County) for significant success in managing and processing its various cases during fiscal 2024. The circuit received two awards – the O’Toole Award and the Permanency Award – during a semiannual meeting of the state’s presiding judges, held in late May in Lake Ozark.

“Litigants, lawyers and the public expect our courts to resolve legal disputes promptly,” Chief Justice Mary R. Russell said. “These awards recognize the hard work of everyone in the circuit to manage cases as efficiently as possible. We recognize the importance of each and every case to the people involved, as well as the anxiety of waiting for a resolution. This is especially important when children are removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect by adults in their lives. These cases can be confusing or downright frightening for the children involved, who rely on our Missouri courts to find them a safe, stable and permanent home as quickly as possible.”

The circuit’s presiding judge, Judge Jerry A. Harmison Jr., said, “It is an honor for the 31st Circuit to receive these two awards. This would not be possible without constant hard work of all judicial staff members to manage cases expeditiously, recognizing the impact of their work on local children and families.”

O'Toole Award

Named for the late judge's service as the first chair of the state judiciary's time standards monitoring committee, the Daniel J. O'Toole Award recognizes circuit courts' excellence in service and delivering timely justice to the public.

A circuit can earn the award by achieving a clearance rate of one, meaning the circuit, on average, closed as many cases as were filed in a given year across the measured categories of cases, preventing a backlog of cases. The time standards have been in effect since 1997; the clearance rate criteria have been in effect since 2016.

To qualify for this year's award, the 31st circuit had an average clearance rate of approximately 100 percent or higher, meaning it closed at least as many total cases in fiscal 2024 than were filed during the same time frame. It is the fifth time the 31st circuit has qualified for the O'Toole Award. It was one of eight circuits qualifying for fiscal 2024.

Permanency Award

The Permanency Award recognizes the leadership and hard work of judges, juvenile officers, clerks, children's division workers, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and other support staff to protect children who have been abused or neglected. The time standards, established in 2006, apply to certain types of hearings in cases in which children are removed from their homes. They are intended to help provide stability for the children by ensuring they are reunited with their families or placed in another permanent home as soon as possible.

In fiscal 2024, there were nearly 44,600 mandatory hearings. Collectively, the state's courts completed 95 percent of these critical abuse and neglect hearings on time. Impressively, all 16 circuits receiving this year's Permanency Award completed *100 percent* of their hearings on time. This is the 11th time the 31st circuit has earned the Permanency Award.