



## WELCOME FIRST TIME NAWJ MEMBERS

District 6 would like to welcome the following new member; Judge Ana L. Escobar, General Sessions Court Davidson County, Division 3.

If you or any member you know has received an award, please forward the information to Judge Lynda Jones at [lyndajones@jnsnashville.gov](mailto:lyndajones@jnsnashville.gov). We want to support and recognize our members in District 6!

We are asking each member to encourage others to join. The membership types and annual fees are as follows: Sitting Judge - \$245, Associate Member - \$220, Retired Judge - \$220, Amicus Judicii - \$220, Law Clerk - \$80, Law Students - \$55 and **First Time Member Special** - \$130.

## NEW-MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



**Judge Melissa Blackburn**  
Mental Health/Veterans Court  
Member of NAWJ Volunteer Committee

For nearly seven years I have had the honor of serving as the Judge of Mental Health Court and Veterans Court for Nashville-Davidson County.

In that time, the city of Nashville has been at the forefront of innovations within the justice system resulting in courts that address cause rather than punishment, including the Mental Health Court. Studies have consistently shown that persons suffering from a serious or persistent mental illness and/or developmental disability do not respond well to the traditional sanctions imposed in the adversarial environment of the criminal justice system.

This court was established to address the issues surrounding criminal defendants who are diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness, developmental disability, or suffer from co-occurring disorder. Our court has been considered one of the first of its kind to provide a mentally ill criminal defendant with a single point of contact within the criminal justice system for early identification purposes.

Mental Health Court staff works with our clients to provide treatment to address the issues that have brought them into the justice system. Many have little to no supervision to deal with their condition, or issues such as substance abuse, that can be tied to their illness. The court may provide assistance with transitional housing, job training, and substance abuse treatment among other services. Since 2001, participants in the Davidson County Mental Health Court have a re-arrest and conviction

rate of less than ten percent, returning a good investment not only to participants, but the community as they return as productive contributors. Moving away from an “out of sight, out of mind” incarceration approach is vital if we are to fulfill our societal obligations.

We have come to a point where governments can and must employ innovative thinking and comprehensive solutions that truly work to engage the issue of mental health. The time has come to look at all the possibilities working toward a sustainable long-term solution to the mental health question.

According to recent statistics, mental health assessments of Davidson County inmates over the past eight years has increased 161%. Inmates placed on suicide watch has grown by 273% leading to an increased metro government-wide consensus that we must explore all our options to address this growing issue.

When we consider the challenges our network of providers face as more cuts are made to these lifeline services in state and county budgets, innovative thinking and creativity in programs becomes more critical.

While we face large and intractable challenges in the area of mental health care, we should be hopeful that true commitment to solutions will result from our leadership. Many of the pieces are in place to weave a safety net that can help the most vulnerable among us and can uphold the first priority in the justice system: public safety.

## REMINDER ~ SAVE THE DATES

**APRIL 15, 2021**  
2021 NAWJ Midyear Meeting Reception

**APRIL 16, 2021**  
2021 NAWJ Midyear Meeting

**APRIL 16, 2021**  
Tennessee Color of Justice Program

**OCTOBER 6, 2021**  
NAWJ 43rd Annual Conference

