

City of Cincinnati



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Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney
Councilmember

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MOTION

Unofficial juvenile courts have existed in three Cincinnati communities: Madisonville, Price Hill and Avondale. Juveniles who are charged with low level, nonviolent, and or status offenses are referred by the Hamilton County Juvenile Court to these unofficial community courts. For each case, volunteers work with the child and their family to understand the root cause of the behavior, strategize on how to best support those impacted, provide community-based resources, and connect them with other necessary services. This type of community programming helps to keep young people out of the court system, and thereby prevent their involvement in the system when they are adults.

The Madisonville branch of the Community Court is requesting funding to build a more expansive program with training materials, transportation, and resources for the youth and their families so that the Community Court can be replicated in other Cincinnati neighborhoods.

WE MOVE that City Council allocate \$50,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to expand the reach and impact of Community Court with the goal of helping youth to stay out of the court and prison system as an adult.


Councilmember Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney

STATEMENT

The work of the Hamilton County Juvenile Court's Madisonville branch of Community Court has been life-changing for many children and their families due to the dedication of community volunteers who organize trainings and handle cases referred to the unofficial court by the Hamilton County Juvenile Court.

Ms. Dora Chappell, who volunteers as the "judge" for the Madisonville branch of the Community Court has requested funding in order to train volunteers with the goal of replicating Community Court in other Cincinnati neighborhoods. The funding will be used to build an expansive program with training materials, transportation, and resources for the youth and their families.

See attached statement from Ms. Dora Chappell of the Madisonville branch of Community Court for juveniles.

MEMORANDUM

TO: CINCINNATI CITY COUNCILMEMBER JAN MICHELE LEMON KEARNEY

FROM: MS. DORA CHAPPELL

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY COURT FUNDING REQUEST

DATE: APRIL 9, 2021

CC: JUDGE KARI BLOOM, IRIS ROLEY

Dear Councilmember Kearney,

For the last fourteen years I have run the Juvenile Court's Madisonville branch of Community Court. Community Court is an opportunity for kids who are charged with low level, nonviolent, and/or status offenses to have their cases heard unofficially. I am the Judge of my Court. I have a few unofficial probation officers, who are volunteers from the community. I do all of the training and organizing so the Court can exist.

My Court receives case referrals from the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. I have developed a process for handling cases that includes visiting the child (until COVID-19), speaking with the parent, finding services to refer the family to, and holding at least two hearings for each child. We go through the charges, the circumstances around the charges, and dive into the relationship with the child and their family. The goal is to make sure that we get to the root of the behavior, support the child and family, and provide community-based resources, all while avoiding taking the case to official Court.

Our program has been very successful, I am proud of the work we do in our community, for our community. This program can be replicated in neighborhoods across the city, helping children and families avoid unnecessary contact with official Court. Statistics (and my experience) show that keeping kids out of the court system is the best way to prevent system involvement as an adult. These children need our help.

I have organized my Court as a volunteer, but I can't expand the impact without funding. With a Fifty thousand dollar uplift we can build a program with training materials, transportation to and from, and materials for children and families (as examples) that can fit most Cincinnati-based neighborhoods. I have talked to Judge Kari Bloom from the Hamilton County Juvenile Court, and she is willing to be the court liaison to help spread the Community Court effectiveness, as well as find participants and other people to get involved with this effort.

Please contact me at your convenience to speak to the details of my request. Judge Bloom, Iris Roley, and I are happy to provide further information on the importance of community based programming, and the success we have seen with our efforts so far.