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ARIZONA SUPERIOR COURT IN PIMA COUNTY'S STEPs DRUG DIVERSION PROGRAM NAMED 2021 ARIZONA JUDICIAL BRANCH EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION AWARDEE

PIMA COUNTY, AZ – Pima County Superior Court's newly launched pre-indictment drug diversion program "STEPs" has been named this year's Excellence and Innovation awardee by the Arizona Supreme Court.

"We are honored by the State's acknowledgment," said Presiding Judge Jeffrey T. Bergin. "STEPs is the result of years of planning, community building, and justice stakeholder partnerships."

Launched this past March, STEPs (Supportive Treatment and Engagement Program) is an evidence-based, pre-indictment drug diversion court. It provides short-term targeted treatment and therapy to individuals charged with first- or second-time felony drug possession who are also struggling with mental health and addiction issues. Those successful in the program will have their initial drug possession charges dismissed entirely by the Pima County Attorney's Office.

"STEPs was created to give our community members an opportunity to participate in early drug treatment, education, and individualized therapy," said Associate Presiding Judge Danelle Liwski, who oversees the STEPs program.

The idea for STEPs was born in late 2019. In addition to several court divisions, key planning partners included representatives from the Pima County Attorney's Office, Pima County Public Defense Services, the Court's Pretrial Services Department, Pima County Administration, the Sheriff's Department, and the Tucson Police Department.

Participants are supported and supervised during their recovery by local behavioral health and service partners, including the Behavioral Awareness Center, Inc.; CODAC Health, Recovery, and Wellness; Community Bridges, Inc. (CBI); Community Health Associates, Inc.; Community Medical Services (CMS); HOPE, Inc.; La Frontera Arizona; Old Pueblo Community Services, and The Haven.

"The program is an extension of the Court's continued commitment to fairness and access to justice," said Judge Bergin. "Only two other courts in the nation have a similar pre-indictment program."

Since the introduction of STEPs this year, nearly 200 individuals have joined. As the program continues to develop, the Court anticipates more than 1000 individuals will enter STEPs each year, all at no cost to the participant.

About the award

Under its Strategic Agenda for Arizona Courts: "[Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence](#)," the Arizona Supreme Court and Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) honor individuals, teams, and projects that have made extraordinary contributions to the administration of justice in Arizona.

In addition to the Promoting Judicial Branch Excellence and Innovation Award, other categories include, Promoting Access to Justice; Protecting Children, Families, and Communities; Enhancing Professionalism within Arizona's Courts, and Promoting Public Trust and Confidence.

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