

# Articles

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By Denise Barnes  
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## Judges, Residents Explore New Approach to Justice

Judges and other D.C. Superior Court officials yesterday met with Southeast residents to explain a new problem-solving approach to criminal justice.

"Community Court," the new program, calls for judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors and treatment providers to work with residents to achieve the best outcome for victims, defendants and their communities. The Metropolitan Police Department has employed a similar approach called community policing to improve its crime-fighting capabilities.

"The more cooperation between the police and citizens, the better the police can do their jobs," Chief Judge Rufus G. King III said during the town hall meeting yesterday. "We need community involvement in the courts. Once a person is found to be an offender, what will the solutions be?"

About 15 of the 50 participants were Ward 8 residents in the East of the River Community Court Town Hall Meeting, a four-hour forum at the National Children's Center on Martin Luther King Avenue SE. They told court officials of their concerns about quality-of-life issues from minor disturbances to prostitution and open-air drug markets.

"Most of us who work in the court system don't know a lot about fighting or shouting in the neighborhood - the things that can make it hard to get through the day. Community Court is a great way to solve issues. The courts need to know first-hand what the problems are," Judge King said.

Judge Noel Anketell Kramer noted an increase in misdemeanor offenders.

"They are not murderers or armed robbers. They are drug users, many who live in the East of the River community. We can get them drug [rehabilitation] help and help them to find employment. We have the ability to change lives, not just have trials," said Judge Kramer, who presides over the Criminal Division East of the River Community Court.

About 15 residents participated in an electronic question-and-answer survey that asked them to rate their community's quality of life and assess their neighborhood's strengths and weaknesses. They cited auto theft, illicit drug sales, vandalism and gang-related violence as major problems and concerns.

Longtime resident Brian Reed said he has seen a lot of change in his neighborhood, but much of it has not helped the people who live there.

"There's a lot of development going on in the neighborhood, but none of the people who live here can get jobs. That's disheartening for young people to see," Mr. Reed said.

Alice Tolbert, who has lived in Southeast for 14 years, said she hasn't seen any positive changes in her community.

"I see a lot of drug trafficking. I see a lot of police cars in the neighborhood [converging on one car] when I have 12 guys behind my home selling drugs," Ms. Tolbert said.

"I've had bullets coming through my home after I've had surgery. I see the trash. We have several churches in the neighborhood, we have a lot of schools, we have businesses, and still we have nothing," she said.

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