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School of Law's Truancy Court Program Named a 'Bright Idea' by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government

Center for Families, Children and the Courts' Non-Punitive Approach to Encouraging Truant Students Back to School Honored as Innovative Government-Academic Partnership

The Truancy Court Program developed by the University of Baltimore School of Law Center for Families, Children and the Courts has been recognized by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, as a Bright Idea.

Bright Ideas recognizes and shares innovative government programs and partnerships. The designation is bestowed upon programs that provide creative and effective solutions to widespread problems, such as truancy, especially those that can be considered and adopted by other communities. CFCC's Truancy Court Program is one of 111 programs selected from across the country by a team of policy experts from academic and public sectors.

The Truancy Court Program was selected as a Bright Idea for its leadership and innovation in transforming the way schools and courts approach truant students and their families. When CFCC began the program in 2005, truancy had reached epidemic proportions in Maryland. Schools often used a punitive or coercive approach to truancy, filing criminal charges against parents of truant students.

Convinced that a comprehensive, collaborative and community-based approach would be more effective, CFCC convened school and court stakeholders to develop a program model based on a non-adversarial and holistic approach to identify and address the reasons underlying a child's truant behavior. Since 2005, CFCC's Truancy Court Program has served more than 1,000 students and their families in 32 schools, and 25 Maryland judges and masters have volunteered in the program.

"CFCC's Truancy Court Program is a standout due to the extraordinary commitment of our volunteer judges, CFCC staff, University of Baltimore law students, and public school partners," said CFCC Director and Associate Professor of Law **Barbara Babb**. "Our TCP judges carve out time from their packed schedules to meet with students, teachers, and parents in school, once a week, for 10 weeks. The entire team holds students accountable, encourages them, and inspires them. It's a powerful and positive experience for everyone involved."

In the 2011-12 school year, the program continues to demonstrate dramatic growth and remarkable effectiveness. It served a total of 149 students in six Baltimore City schools, with an

unprecedented 80 percent (119 students) graduating from the program, while achieving a minimum 65 percent reduction in unexcused absences/tardies and improving academics and behavior during the 10-week program.

Babb said that while many law schools offer their host neighborhoods legal representation for disadvantaged clients, few are involved in early intervention initiatives that are designed to keep young people and families out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems in the first place.

“The CFCC Truancy Court Program advances two important goals for the University of Baltimore School of Law,” Dean **Ronald Weich** said. “It gives us a chance to serve our community, and it helps prepare our students to be more effective lawyers when they graduate. Law students who work with CFCC get hands-on experience as they learn about the challenges many young people face.”

Learn [more](#) about CFCC’s Truancy Court Program.

Bright Ideas are showcased on the Ash Center’s [Government Innovators Network](#), an online platform for practitioners and policymakers to share innovative public policy solutions.

The University of Baltimore is a member of the University System of Maryland and comprises the School of Law, the Yale Gordon College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Public Affairs and the Merrick School of Business.