



Local Judge Takes Part in National Discussion on Incarceration and Children

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By Michelle Wirth

A Fulton County Superior Court Judge was among two local judges to take part in a recent policy discussion at the White House on the effects of parental incarceration on children.

The discussion included policy makers, researchers and judges like Fulton County Superior Court judge Kimberly Esmond Adams.

“We talked about their graduation rates, the fact that many of them don’t go on to college, the inability for many of those families to remain intact for a variety of reasons, and we end up a lot of those young people, regrettably, in courts across this country.”

Esmond Adams says she doesn’t have any local data on how many people sentenced to prison also have children but she believes the numbers are significant.

“Without committing to an actual figure, I do believe that it’s safe to say that probably upwards of 50 percent of the defendants who are sentenced to time in, and I won’t say the county jail, but to time in prison in have children.”

Esmond Adams hopes to develop a pilot program in her court to collect actual data and explore possible solutions.

“I am happy to use my court and the defendants who appear before me as the test for it.”

She hopes to develop a worksheet requiring defendants to list how many children they have and their ages. Defendants would also list who the primary care giver would be if they’re removed from their family and how they would maintain contact with their children.

“It is my hope that in creating the worksheet and perhaps by working with the defense bar and with defendants at least who come before this court perhaps on a trial basis that we can begin deal with that issue. Also, I am hopeful in doing this we might be able to look at alternatives to incarceration for less violent offenses.”

Esmond Adams also plans to work with a local non-profit group that helps incarcerated children see their parents on a regular basis and receive services to help them succeed.+