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Solicitor Wilson Announces Centralized Domestic Violence Court Resumes in Charleston County

Charleston, S.C.— Citing the General Sessions criminal case backlog, Solicitor Scarlett Wilson announces resuming the operations of Centralized Domestic Violence Court. Solicitor Wilson's statement:

We tried centralizing domestic violence cases in magistrate court for several years. Eventually, we abandoned centralization in magistrate's court when a 2015 change in the law allowed us to prosecute third degree DV cases in General Sessions Court. At the time, using General Sessions, versus the remote magistrate's court, allowed the benefit of geographically streamlining and conserving resources for public defenders and prosecutors. The County Courthouse Complex also provided greater security for all parties. Recently, County Council provided new magistrate courtrooms and chambers within the Judicial Complex where prosecutors and public defenders are located. We can now prosecute third degree cases there without the hardships of having most lawyers travel. In addition, the General Sessions Docket has swollen and the Circuit Court cannot efficiently manage domestic violence cases for which an immediate response is critical. The Centralized DV Court will ease some of the backlog's pressure on General Sessions Court.

In January, Chief Magistrate Judge Annie Summey began overseeing the Domestic Violence Court. We are grateful she has been willing to work with us, the public defenders and court administration to make this happen. Judge Summey will provide the consistency and stability we need while avoiding a "one size fits all" approach to victims and defendants. My hope is this dedicated court "on campus" will process cases expeditiously, thus reducing the opportunity batterers have to intimidate their partners into abandoning charges. I am committed to improving accountability for defendants, enhancing the safety of victims and providing rehabilitation options when it can safely keep families together.

Judge Summey's Centralized DV Court is in session every Monday morning at 101 Meeting Street and processes the County's third-degree domestic violence cases. Defendants have an opportunity to plead guilty, have a bench trial, or request a jury trial. Jury trials will be held, as they always have been, in the venue where the alleged crime was committed. Municipalities will continue to handle their own cases.

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