



**Summit County
Domestic Relations Court**
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

Media Release
For Immediate Release



Homeless Education Liaison Jennifer Montisano and Admin. Judge Katarina Cook - Judge Cook gives Project Rise 500 Bus Passes to support access to justice. (Summit DR Court)

Cook Helps Caregivers Take Next Step to Become Legal Custodians: Strengthening Stability for Children through Community-based Justice.

Summit County Domestic Relations Court Partners with Akron
Public Schools and Legal Aid Organizations to Support Caregivers
and Students



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On **Friday, January 30, 2026 Akron, Summit County** – The Summit County Domestic Relations Court held the **Legal Aid for Legal Custody Clinic** at the Akron Public Schools Board of Education Office, once again bringing legal services directly into the community. The clinic focused on assisting third-party caregivers such as grandparents and relatives who are stepping in to care for children and need guidance navigating custody through the court system. Each year approximately 1,500 – 2,000 students are identified as experiencing homelessness and this clinic gives immediate opportunity to caregivers to fix this problem.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS THE MISSION

Spearheaded by **Akron Public School’s Project Rise** and supported by **Administrative Judge Katarina Cook**, whose leadership continues to prioritize access to justice and child-centered outcomes. As part of that commitment, **Judge Cook donated 500 bus passes to Project RISE**, helping reduce transportation barriers that can prevent families from accessing courts, schools, and essential services.

“For many families, the justice system feels distant or intimidating. When we step outside the courthouse and into the community, we remove barriers—fear, confusion, transportation—that too often stand between people and the help they need. Justice works best when it is accessible, visible, and rooted in trust.”

- **Administrative Judge Katarina Cook**



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During the clinic, **18 families were assisted, with six appearing before a magistrate to obtain temporary custody orders.** Federal law under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides an essential safety net, allowing children experiencing housing instability to enroll in school and access transportation and services even when formal documentation is not yet in place. However, that safety net has a time limitation. This clinic built on that foundation by helping families obtain temporary custody orders to actually have the person who has physical custody of a child through the court process become a legal custodian-which is necessary for benefits, medical care and school enrollment purposes.

THE VILLAGE OF SUPPORT

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child, in this case the village was made possible through strong collaboration with community partners and the courts. Legal Aid organizations including **Community Legal Aid, Summit County Public Defenders Office, and Asian Services In Action** provided volunteer attorneys who gave free, one-on-one guidance to families. Their presence ensured that caregivers received accurate information, practical next steps, and helped complete the forms to file so that the caregiver was prepared for their court hearing. In addition to the legal guidance, **Judge Katarina Cook** was accompanied by two magistrates to ensure that cases could be heard and caregivers given temporary orders in the same day. Staff from **Summit County Juvenile Court** was also on-hand to address cases that under the jurisdiction of the Summit County Juvenile Court.



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THE RULE NOT THE EXCEPTION

Clinics like this are not the exception, but the norm under the leadership of **Judge Katarina Cook of the Summit County Domestic Relations Court**, which regularly brings services out of the courthouse and into the community. Last year **Judge Cook hosted six community-based clinics throughout Summit County a commitment that continues this Friday, February 6, 2026** with the Summit County Domestic Relations Court's Family Law Clinic. The Family Law Clinic is a partnership with the **Ohio Justice Bus**, Local Family Law Bar, and Community Partners and is hosting its fourth year of free legal service, to date reaching a little over **600 residents in Summit County and beyond**. Judge Cook will continue to host this clinic throughout the year. Persons who are seeking legal assistance in areas of law such as Divorce, Parentage, Civil Protection or other Family Law Matters should visit www.drcourt.org for more information on upcoming and to register for this Friday's clinic.

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