

Franklin County Municipal Court



PRESS RELEASE
January 15, 2025

Franklin County Municipal Court's Self Help Center Director Wins National Visionary Award

A national research organization that focuses on ensuring equitable access to justice for all awarded the director of the Franklin County Municipal Court's Self Help Center and Dispute Resolution Department for being a justice visionary who has spurred change nationally.

The Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) honored Director Robert Southers with the Alli Gerkman Legal Visionary Award, given to a leader who identifies gaps in the legal system, addresses them, and leaves a lasting impact.

Southers has led the Court's Self Help Center since 2017, a year after the Franklin County's Municipal Judges started it. His initiatives have made the Center a national model that courts nationwide now emulate.

The Self Help Center offers guidance to self-representing civil litigants, so they don't have to navigate the Municipal Court alone.

The Center does this by empowering residents with tailored guidance on civil matters, ensuring everyone knows their next court steps, linking residents to additional resources, providing court-approved mediation services, assisting with expungements and case sealings, and more.

This innovative approach for pro se civil litigants sparked interest from prominent professors at universities like Harvard and Georgetown to study the Center.

"To be recognized for this critical work by an organization like IAALS is an incredible testament to our shared commitment of making justice accessible to all," Southers said, adding that the Center

Franklin County Municipal Court
375 S. High St.,
Columbus, Ohio, 43215
614-645-8214
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org

Contact - Jodi Andes
Public Information Officer
Desk - 614-621-9389
Cell - 614-400-1359
Jodi.Andes@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org

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will continue to innovate solutions that improve our system and positively impact all who seek justice.”

The center also shows the Municipal Court’s 15 Judges’ commitment to ensuring equitable access to justice and justice for all. More people turn to the Center annually, with more than 30,000 people utilizing it in 2024.

A sponsor of the award said Southers was chosen partly because the Center has made such a far-reaching, lasting difference in many people.

“We must identify gaps in the system, foster collaboration to address them, and do the work to make a significant, deep, and lasting impact. Robert has done all of this to create sustainable solutions that bring real change to people’s lives. He exemplifies what it means to be a legal visionary, and it is a great honor to give him this much-deserved award,” said Brittany Kauffman, CEO of IAALS.

The Self Help Center takes walk-in appointments only Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Municipal Court, 375 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio.

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