



Minnesota State Treatment Court Conference

June 5 & 6, 2023

Speaker Biographies

Aaron Arnold

Chief Development Officer, National Association of Drug Court Professionals

Aaron Arnold is chief development officer at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, where he works to develop new initiatives to support and strengthen drug courts across the country. Prior to joining NADCP, Aaron spent 15 years at the Center for Court Innovation, overseeing the Center's national work in the areas of treatment courts, community justice, alternatives to incarceration, tribal justice, and more. Aaron has served as a prosecutor with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office in Phoenix, Arizona, where he gained first-hand experience working in several problem-solving courts. Aaron is graduate of Cornell University and the University of Arizona College of Law.

Cecilia Bliss, MSW

State Treatment Court Coordinator, Minnesota Judicial Branch

Cecilia Bliss has served as the State Treatment Court Coordinator at the State Court Administrator's Office since 2021. As the state coordinator, Prior to her role at SCAO, she worked in statewide criminal justice and crime victim services programs in Texas. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and Master of Social Work from Boston University.

Judge Peggy Davis

NADCP Senior Judicial Fellow, National Association of Drug Court Professionals

Judge Peggy Davis is the drug court commissioner for the 31st Circuit Court in Greene County, Missouri. Since 2000, she has, at various times, presided over the DWI court, adult drug court, family drug court, mental health court, and veterans court. Judge Davis serves as faculty for NADCP and the National Judicial College. She sits on the Missouri Drug Courts Coordinating Commission and is past president of the board of directors for the Missouri Association of Drug Court Professionals. She has also served as a member of the Missouri Supreme Court Alternative Treatment Courts Committee. In 2011, the Women's Justice Awards recognized her contribution in the field of government and the law by naming her Public Official of the Year. She was one of the recipients of the Missouri Supreme Court Excellence in the Judiciary Award in 2016. She received her B.A. degree from the University of Oklahoma, with Highest Honors. She received her J.D. from Oklahoma City University School of Law. Judge Davis has practiced civil law, and has served as a public defender for the State of Missouri, as an assistant prosecutor for Greene County, and as adjunct faculty for Ozarks Technical Community College.

John Haroldson

Consultant, National Drug Court Institute

John Haroldson is the first Latino elected as district attorney in the State of Oregon and has served as a prosecutor since 1988. His commitment to treatment court programs is underscored by his proactive and direct engagement with the Benton County drug treatment court, a program in its 16th year of operation, and recognized as a National Mentor Court. Mr. Haroldson has served as adjunct faculty for the NADCP, National District Attorneys Association, Conference of Western Attorneys General, American Bar Association, and Willamette University College of Law. He also serves on the Oregon Bench and Bar Commission on Professionalism, on the board of directors for the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute, and as chair of the President's Diversity Advisory Community Council for the University of Oregon. He has been recognized for excellence in prosecution by the Oregon Crime Victims Network and the Oregon Humane Society. He is also a recipient of the Oregon Bench and Bar's Edwin J. Peterson Professionalism Award, and the Oregon Hispanic Bar Association's Paul J. de Muniz Professionalism Award. The son of a Scandinavian father and a Mexican mother, Mr. Haroldson was raised both in the Pacific Northwest and in Monterrey, Mexico, where he developed a rich bilingual and bicultural perspective.

Heather Kirchner

Lead Treatment Court Coordinator, Fifth Judicial District

Heather Kirchner has been working for the Fifth Judicial District treatment court program since 2018 and was promoted to Lead Treatment Court Coordinator in 2020. Her treatment court duties include coordinating the Rock-Nobles and Pipestone-Murray adult drug courts and supervising the District treatment court programs and coordinators. She also oversees the Ignition Interlock Device Program for the Fifth District. Prior to her time with the Branch, Heather held professional positions as the Treatment Director for Southwestern Mental Health Center's Intensive Residential Treatment facility and as the Children Services Supervisor for Nobles County. Heather has a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology from Minnesota State University, Mankato and a Master of Social Work degree from University of South Dakota.

Judge Kerry Meyer

Assistant Chief Judge, Fourth Judicial District

Honorable Kerry Meyer is the Assistant Chief Judge of the Fourth Judicial District. Judge Meyer was appointed to the bench in 2006. Prior to her appointment, she served as Assistant County Attorney in the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, where she also worked as a Law Clerk. Judge Meyer received her bachelor's degree from Alma College in Michigan and her J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School.

MaryKay Riendeau, LADC, LSW, MSW

Department Head for Human Services and Addiction Services, Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range

MaryKay Riendeau, LADC, LSW, MSW, is the Department Head for Human Services and Addiction Studies at Minnesota North College-Mesabi Range Campus. She has been a faculty member for 20 years and department head for 13 years. MaryKay has 20 plus years of experience working in addiction studies and has 35 plus years working in the human services field. She has extensive experience and dedication to the field of addiction studies. In 2006, MaryKay was on the multidisciplinary team that established the Range Drug Court (currently Range Hybrid Treatment Court) and was part of the team for several years. In 2016, she co-founded College Nights, a successful innovative community educational program involving students, participants, and treatment court professionals exploring recovery in a unique setting. In 2010, MaryKay pioneered bimodal classroom instruction (simultaneous Zoom and in-class) in Minnesota. Since 2019, she has received many grants to assist students in meeting their educational goals including grants for treatment court participants and graduates. Her dedication to providing quality education in innovative methods to assist students in their life endeavors is a passion for her and will continue.

Judge Greg Pinski

Consultant, National Drug Court Institute

Gregory G. Pinski is a retired Montana district judge. He earned his B.A. in political science and journalism from the University of North Dakota and his J.D., with distinction, from the University of North Dakota School of Law. He also attended the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada–Reno. Before taking the bench, Judge Pinski taught at the University of Minnesota Law School and practiced law in Minnesota and Montana. As a district judge, he sat by designation on the Montana Supreme Court and served on the Montana Drug Treatment Court Advisory Committee. Judge Pinski founded a veterans treatment court and presided over a drug treatment court for eight years. During that time, he secured over \$5 million in public and private grants to expand his treatment courts. He worked closely with the Harvard Law School Access to Justice Lab to design a comparative study on treatment court processes. As a member of the National Judicial Opioid Task Force, Judge Pinski authored federal, state, and tribal jurisdictional transfer agreements to expand access to treatment courts. He also drafted the Model Veterans Treatment Court Act for the Uniform Law Commission. In the private sector, Judge Pinski is the president of Treatment Court Consulting Group, LLC, providing treatment court evaluation services, and he founded a nonprofit veterans law clinic. He is a consultant to the NADCP, NDCI, Justice For Vets, and the Tribal Law and Policy Institute, providing research, training, and technical assistance services to treatment courts across the United States.

Kim Pleticha

Director of Public Affairs, Minnesota Judicial Branch

Kim Pleticha is MJB's new Director of Public Affairs. Prior to joining MJB she was the Assistant Communications Director for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Her background includes nonprofit communications direction as well as print and broadcast journalism—she worked as a reporter for KSTP-TV and as a news anchor for All News Channel and 12 News (now CCX Media). She believes good communication makes the world a better place and is happy to assist with all of your communications needs.

Sarah Sistrunk

Consultant, National Drug Court Institute

Sarah Sistrunk obtained her B.S. in psychology and human services in 2006 from Clayton State University, concentrating on working with HIV prevention groups and on the decriminalization of mentally ill offenders in the criminal justice system. She obtained her master's degree in community counseling from Argosy University in 2010. She is a licensed professional counselor in the State of Georgia as well as a member of the National Board of Certified Counselors. She also holds a master addictions counselor certification. Ms. Sistrunk began her career in 1998 at the City of Atlanta Department of Corrections, where she focused on mentally ill offenders, as well as inmates in a substance use program. She has also worked in community corrections, where she supervised various types of offenders. In addition, she worked with the mental health treatment court of Fulton County to improve client efficacy and has worked in inpatient and outpatient mental health and substance use treatment facilities. She is certified to teach Relapse Prevention Therapy, Behavior Stabilization, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, and Thinking for a Change. Currently, she is employed with the Superior Court of Fulton County's accountability court as the clinical director, overseeing the clinical staff and ensuring that evidence-based, manualized treatment is being held to fidelity.

Mark Stodola

Senior Probation Fellow, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

As National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Probation Fellow, Mark Stodola brings over 30 years of experience working in the field of court management and adult probation in Arizona. Mark worked at the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department for 18 years serving in a number of capacities including division director overseeing drug and alcohol treatment programs, problem solving courts and services for the mentally ill. Mark later became the Court Administrator of the Tempe Municipal Court where he served for eight years managing the day to day activities of the court. Most recently Mark served as Program Services Manager in the Adult Probation Services Division of the Arizona Supreme Court where he had oversight of treatment programs for Arizona's Adult Probation Departments. Mark has presented training on topics surrounding high risk drunk drivers at national, regional, and state conferences throughout the country. Mark also is an adjunct instructor at Arizona State University.

Mark received his undergraduate degree in History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his Master's Degree in Education from Northern Arizona University. Mark became a Graduate Fellow through the National Council of State Courts Institute of Court Management.

Aleesha Ward

Treatment Court Coordinator, Sixth Judicial District

Aleesha Ward has been a Treatment Court Coordinator for the Minnesota 6th Judicial District since 2016. Before moving to Northeast Minnesota, she served as a coordinator for a Juvenile Drug Court program in Fargo, North Dakota. She was first hired to manage the Range Hybrid Treatment Court. Since then, she has led efforts to establish three new Treatment Courts in the Sixth Judicial District (e.g., the Cook County Substance Use Recovery Court (SURC), the Lake County SURC, and the North St. Louis County Mental Health Court).