

Andrew Jackson Higgins

Excellence in Juvenile Justice Award

Thursday, October 30, 2014 - Noon



The Recipient

Gary J. Wait began his second term as Missouri's Interim State Courts Administrator on July 1, 2014. Gary served previously as Deputy State Courts Administrator from April 2008 until his retirement in 2012, and also served as Interim State Courts Administrator from May 2007 until April 2008. During his retirement he has served part-time as an interim trial court administrator for the 19th Judicial Circuit and as a juvenile justice consultant for the National Center for State Courts.

In addition to his terms as Deputy State Courts Administrator and Interim State Courts Administrator, Gary has held several positions within the Missouri Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA), including Director of Juvenile and Family Court Programs and Director of Court Programs, Research and Judicial Education.

Prior to joining OSCA, Gary served as Chief Juvenile Officer in Missouri's 14th Judicial Circuit for 16 years, and was employed as a probation and parole officer prior to his duties as Chief Juvenile Officer.

Gary received his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Superior; attended the University of Cambridge in England, and attended graduate school at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He is a Fellow of the Court Executive Development Program of the National Center for State Courts.

Gary recognized and valued power of collaboration and teamwork in the process of development and implementation of any aspect of change to the juvenile justice system. He served as a talent/resource scout in the formation of teams to address issues and possibilities. These traits were recognized and appreciated by his colleagues when he was elected as President of the Missouri Juvenile Justice Association in 1986. Gary would serve as President for two years and throughout his career has maintained his membership status with the association.

Specifically, during Gary's tenure at OSCA, he was instrumental in the development of a statewide system infrastructure that better prepared, equipped, enabled and supported judges, juvenile officers, detention staff, and related agency stakeholders in delivering best practice services and programs to children, youth and families. Serving as the Project Director for the Juvenile and Family Court Case Management System, Gary worked with Senator Kit Bond to earmark \$15 million in federal funding to finance the infrastructure, design and building of software through implementation of the system.

Further, Gary has been recognized as a "major builder" in the Missouri Standards for the Administration of Juvenile Justice; as well as the State Risk and Needs Assessment. Under Gary's leadership at OSCA, the first empirical study regarding influence of ethnicity within the decision-making points in the juvenile justice system was launched and the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative began implementation. All of which led to a statewide enhancement of direct services to youth as well as the validation of services provided. He has mentored many young professionals entering the field of juvenile justice with his inspiring attitude of "we can and we should". Through his leadership, he has challenged and supported others in achieving success.

When Ron Larkin, then State Courts Administrator, established in 1997, a position within OSCA of Division of Juvenile and Adult Court Services, appointed Gary as Director, major enhancements in Juvenile Justice began and have continued to date with Gary being a consistent driving influence. Gary has been a courageous and effective advocate in implementing and advancing best practices and standards of excellence in juvenile justice by being patient, focused, and persistent. In being a visionary leader, Gary has encountered many obstacles, including limited financial resources, resistance to change, and criticism. Gary's professional style is marked with humility, charm, humor, hard work, dedication, and service of excellence. The quality of juvenile justice in Missouri has the imprint of Gary J. Wait.

Gary and his wife Laurie reside in Jefferson City and have three daughters, Ashley, Leighton and Taryn.