



U.S. Representatives Carolyn McCarthy and Tim Bishop with Southampton Town Justice Deborah Kooperstein, center, at a recent House subcommittee hearing on the benefits of the local drug and youth courts.

COURTESY TIM BISHOP

Justice to Congress: Drug Courts Work

Southampton Town Justice Deborah Kooperstein recently went to Washington, D.C., to testify before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee about the benefits of drug courts and youth courts.

Justice Kooperstein's September 18 testimony before the House Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities touted the success of the Southampton Town Youth Court and the East End Regional Intervention Court, which she oversees. Her testimony came as lawmakers considered a reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act.

"It was a challenge but something I felt was well worth it," Justice Kooperstein said of her testimony in an interview on Friday. "I'm very pleased the Congress is looking at this."

Justice Kooperstein submitted both oral and written testimony on the effectiveness of the two local courts. Since the February 2004 inception of the East

End Regional Intervention Court—commonly referred to as a drug court—none of its 25 graduates have been arrested on drug or other criminal charges, she said.

Justice Kooperstein said the local drug court, the creation of which she spearheaded, is now working with a class of 24 participants. In general, the drug court is open to non-violent offenders and uses benchmarks and regular court dates to help participants kick their addictions. The youth court, which was established 12 years ago, allows high school students to judge peers who have committed violations or misdemeanors.

The town justice said she was asked to come to Washington to give testimony by staff members from the office of U.S. Representative Carolyn McCarthy, who is the subcommittee's chairwoman, after she visited in June to lobby for increased funding for drug courts and dropped off information about the

courts. She said staffers told her the lack of recidivism reported by the court was "unheard of."

On September 11, she received a call from Ms. McCarthy's office asking if she would be willing to testify on the benefits of drug courts and other such courts. Justice Kooperstein said she agreed and quickly got to work on her comments.

At the hearing, where five other individuals testified, Justice Kooperstein said she fielded questions from lawmakers on the merits of putting police in schools and the dangers of putting minors in jail next to hardened criminals.

U.S. Representative Tim Bishop, a member of the Education and Labor Committee, attended the September 18 hearing. In a written statement, he praised the town's youth court. "The success of this unique program over the years clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of actively involving young people in the judicial process," he stated.

—ANDREW KESHNER