



Maricopa County Justice Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Justice Courts' Video Appearance Center Wins National Award

Saves Taxpayer Money, Allows Defendants to see a Judge Remotely

PHOENIX – The Maricopa County Justice Courts have received a prestigious National Association of Counties (NACo) award for the Video Appearance Center (VAC).

NACo selected the VAC as a recipient of its Achievement Award in the category of Criminal Justice and Public Safety, saying “Your hard work will yield positive results for Maricopa County residents.”

In fact it already has. Prior to opening the Video Appearance Center, newly-arrested defendants had to be transported in handcuffs and under high security far across Maricopa County to appear before a judge in a courtroom for a proceeding which may last less than five minutes.

Now, those inmates remain in downtown Phoenix and appear on a video link in front of a judge who may be 50 or more miles away. Leveraging technology in this way reduces prisoner transports, reduces time in jail, and reduces the length of time a case remains open. All of these changes have saved Maricopa County taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars since implementation in June, 2016.

Maricopa County's then-Presiding Justice of the Peace C. Steven McMurry led the Justice Courts initiative. “We woke up to the fact that we were keeping people in jail too long,” he said. “We never intended to do that.”

McMurry said opening the Video Appearance Center was the right thing to do in the interest of justice for citizens. “The part we hadn't been paying attention to—the part we weren't being responsible for—was how long it took between the time they were arrested and the time we actually saw them.”

Previous to the VAC's launch, inmates were spending an average of 6.9 days in jail from initial appearance to arraignment. After just two months in operation, that average was down- and has remained down- to just 3.72 days- a 53% decrease.

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Maricopa County Justice Courts
222 N. Central Avenue #210
Phoenix, AZ 85004

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The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office has nearly eliminated the cost and time involved in transporting prisoners from jail to court. Because defendants go before a judge sooner than ever before, they can then be released from jail earlier, thereby affording them a greater opportunity to retain their quality of life.

The NACo award comes on the heels of the Arizona Association of Counties (AACo) also recognizing the Justice Courts with not one, but two awards for the VAC: the 2017 Summit Award in Criminal Justice and Public Safety, and the 2017 Urban Innovation Merit Award.

All three presentations honor innovation and leadership by local governments as they improve services to citizens.

The VAC model has proven so successful that six Maricopa County cities and towns have signed on to utilize the Video Appearance Center in lieu of their municipal court when charges and circumstances are appropriate.

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ABOUT:

There are 26 Justice Courts throughout Maricopa County. Each is presided over by an elected Justice of the Peace. These 'limited jurisdiction' courts handle civil lawsuits (\$10,000 or less, small claims cases (\$3,500 or less), evictions, misdemeanor offenses (shoplifting, writing bad checks, etc), and the full range of civil and criminal traffic offenses, including DUIs. Like other trial and municipal judges, they also preside over orders of protection and injunctions against harassment.

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