

POSITION PAPER FOR AGENDA ITEM

TO:	Board of County Commissioners
FROM:	District Attorney Jacqueline Sartoris
DATE:	January 2, 2024
SUBJECT:	Dedication of DA's new Victim Witness Waiting Room to Lois Galgay Reckitt

Requested Action:

Approve the dedication of our new Victim Witness Waiting Room as the “Lois Galgay Reckitt Victim Witness Waiting Room.”

Background & Purpose of Request:

In January of 2023, I observed a victim waiting to give testimony in a criminal trial spending the better part of a day on the wooden bench directly outside of the courtroom. In addition to being of questionable comfort, this subjected her to negative comments and stares from those going in and out of the courtroom, many of whom were there in support of the Defendant. My office informed me that in the long history of this building, there has never been any other place for victim-witnesses to be during trial. In the following weeks, another victim was reportedly bullied while waiting to testify, again seated on the hard benches. Another waited most of a day accompanied by her minor child and another adult - the child trying to find a comfortable way to sit on the marble flooring, until I made the small conference room adjacent to my office available. That room has since been regularly offered to victim witnesses, but that is not always possible.

Most modern courthouses are built to include a victim-witness waiting room, not visible to Defendants, other witnesses, or observers who may have an opinion about a trial. I began looking for an appropriate space in March of 2023. My assistant, Abbey StClair, took the primary responsibility to clear out half of a large former hallway filled floor to ceiling with old files and memorabilia. This space is outside of the Law Court, and adjacent to my office. The County began constructing a new wall and door in late October. This small (6.5' x 12') but cozy space will be painted before the end of January, and we are on the hunt for appropriately-scaled furniture. All of the work has been graciously paid for with County funds, and I am very grateful for the consistent support of our Manager at every step in making this happen.

The room's construction neared completion just as we lost one of Maine's most notable and fierce advocates for justice for victims, Lois Galgay Reckitt. Lois's well-known determination to secure justice for survivors of domestic violence and the underserved is written throughout Maine's laws, in our state's commitment to advocacy, and in the roadmap she left us to finish her lifetime of truly inspiring work. Her family and the County Manager join me in support of dedicating the new Victim Witness Waiting room to Lois. I hope to have your support. We plan a small dedication ceremony in February.

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Funding Amount and Source:

There is no funding beyond the regular budget. We anticipate incidental expenses to furnish such a small room will be culled from our existing funds.

Effective Date:

We anticipate a public dedication of the room in February, however, the room will be in use to support victim-witnesses during trials as soon as it is painted and has seating.

Attachments:

None. Please stop up to see our room-in-waiting!