

In The Spotlight with: Magistrate Susana Lewis, Medina County Common Pleas Court Probate and Juvenile Divisions

By Kate Feeks

In September watch for the next episode of *Law Talk*, hosted by John Celebrezze. This episode features Magistrate Susana Lewis, Medina County Juvenile Court. This show can be viewed on Wadsworth Cable (WCTV) Public Access, Channel 15, Brunswick Area Television (BAT) Public Access, Channel 21, and Armstrong Cable Access, Channel 37.

Magistrate Lewis has served as a Medina County Juvenile Court Magistrate since her appointment by Judge John J. Lohn in June, 2005. Primarily assigned to the delinquency docket, Magistrate Lewis presides over hundreds of cases each year including: juvenile traffic, status offenses, misdemeanors and felonies.

While a judge is elected in Ohio, a magistrate is appointed and has limited law enforcement and administration authority. The Medina County Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over persons under the age of eighteen or if the individual has been committed to the Department of Youth Services (DYS) up until twenty-one years of age.

Magistrate Lewis handles different types of cases in juvenile court. Status offenses are charges due to the status of the individuals, in her case younger defendants. Specific status offenses include truancy and curfew matters. The misdemeanor cases she handles range from minor misdemeanors to M-1 offenses, the highest level. Felonies range from F-5 to F-1, the most serious. Parole violations brought before her include individuals that are over eighteen that have been sent to DYS.

Magistrate Lewis works diligently to ensure a balance when making the appropriate sentences to the juveniles that appear before her. "I feel the most difficult part about my job is to look beyond what maybe seems obvious. My goal is to address the individual's real concerns in order to stop them from reoffending, while making a suitable consequence that also protects the community" Lewis said.

Many times it is difficult to make decisions about the future of the child with only the information gathered during the court interview process. Along with talking to family, other kids and the school, there is another way to break through the "juggling act with limited information" according to Lewis. The OYAS tool, or Ohio Youth Assessment System, is a new instrument being used in Ohio courts. Its purpose is to offer the courts more information on individuals during court process. The tool basically analyzes characteristics of personality with a series of questions. The history of the individual is assessed by looking at family, peer association, history of drug usage, prior convictions, and multiple offenses.

Lewis attributes her experience as a prosecutor as her best preparation for the many duties required of a magistrate. She served as a Summit County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney from 1994 to 2005, and Counsel for the Stark County Department of Human Services from 1991 to 1994. Lewis received her Bachelor's Degree from Kean College in New Jersey in 1987, and is a 1990 graduate of the University of Akron Law School. She resides in Medina County with her husband and 2 children.

To learn more about the functions of the Medina County Common Pleas Court Probate and Juvenile Divisions as well as more information on the responsibilities of a Magistrate watch for an interview with Magistrate Susana Lewis on the show *Law Talk* throughout the month of September on your local cable.