

Administrative Office of the Court

## The Sixth Judicial Circuit of Florida

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## Boys Court Is Launched In Pinellas County

CLEARWATER - In an effort to give some direction to male juveniles once they find themselves in the criminal justice system, Judge James Pierce launched Boys Court on Jan. 15.

Any boy up to 17 years old qualifies for Boys Court, except for those youth who are accused of serious violent offenses, such as aggravated battery or capital sex offenses, or who are suffering from severe mental-health issues.



Judge James Pierce

Boys Court is not a substitute for the criminal juvenile-delinquency proceedings that occur in Unified Family Court. Rather, it is an effort by the Sixth Judicial Circuit to steer wayward youth to productive lives through the use of motivational speakers, mentors, journaling, community service, and close monitoring.

Any boy who satisfactorily completes Boys Court in all likelihood will see a more favorable disposition of his case in Unified Family Court.

This is how Boys Court works. The boy's attorney explains Boys Court to his client, parent or guardian, and, if the youth agrees to participate, the attorney submits an application to Judge Pierce.

Judge Pierce will determine whether the youth qualifies based on the nature of the charge, his criminal history, and the youth's willingness to engage in the appropriate services.

If the boy is accepted into Boys Court, the court will forward an acceptance letter to the parent or guardian along with a schedule of the Boys Court sessions.

The sessions last one hour, and take place every other Friday at the Pinellas County Justice Center in Clearwater.

Each youth admitted will undergo a behavioral evaluation and be assigned a mentor. Participants are required to attend school daily, avoid new charges, keep a journal of their daily activities, and meet all the other responsibilities assigned by the court.

Boys Court sessions include an inspirational speaker, opportunity for dialogue, and an evaluation of each youth's behavioral compliance. The sessions will last six months, and culminate with a celebration of the youth's achievements.

The motivational speakers thus far have been Circuit Judge Michael Andrews, Keith Babb, founder of 2nd C.H.A.N.C.E. Center for 4 Boyz, and Leonard Johnson, the New England Patriots football player.



Circuit Judge Michael Andrews speaks at Boys Court