

Supervisor of UCPD Juvenile Unit Earns Statewide Award



An assistant prosecutor has earned a statewide excellence award for her efforts to improve the juvenile justice system in Union County, acting county Prosecutor Grace H. Park announced this week.

Susan Gleason, supervisor of the Union County Prosecutor's Office Juvenile Unit, received the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives (JDAI) Champion Award at the JDAI

All-Sites Conference held last Thursday and Friday in East Brunswick. New Jersey became one of the nation's first states to replicate the national JDAI program in 2004; it first was developed in the 1990s in response to national trends reflecting a dramatic increase in the use of detention for juveniles despite decreases in juvenile arrests, resulting in widespread overcrowding of youth detention centers across the country.

"Susan's work with juvenile defendants is completely ahead of the game – she not only pursues fair and just prosecutions on behalf of our victims, but she has also made tremendous strides towards ensuring that juvenile defendants are on the path towards rehabilitation, not recidivism," acting Prosecutor Park said. "Her extraordinary work in this often-overlooked area of law enforcement is enormously valued by this office and by the county."

In addition to her responsibilities overseeing prosecution of every Union County case involving juveniles, Gleason, a county resident, serves as co-chair of the county's Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement. She was nominated for her award by members of that council.

Additionally, Gleason recently played an instrumental role in applying for and earning a \$120,000 New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission Innovations grant – the highest value available – for the implementation of a new community-based support services demonstration project. Through that project, the county hopes to get young people who find themselves in the juvenile justice system reconnected with their home communities with supervision and support.

"Susan believes in the importance of rehabilitation in the juvenile justice system; while as a prosecutor she's tough, she is also caring, to both victims and to the young people who are charged with offenses," New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission Director of Local Programs and Services Jennifer

LeBaron said. "Sue also makes time to organize committees, to ensure Union County is in compliance with state mandates, and to serve as a trainer for various groups. We're not quite sure how she makes time for it all, but we commend her and know she is deserving of this award."

JDAI programs today exist in nearly 40 states and the District of Columbia. Studies showed that, between 1993 and 2002, juvenile arrests for the most serious criminal offenses dropped by nearly 45 percent in New Jersey even though the daily population in youth detention centers here rose by nearly 40 percent. As recently as 1996, such centers were operating at 166 percent of approved capacity.