

Safe Babies Court Begins Enrolling Families in Three North Carolina Counties



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Safe Babies Court Begins Enrolling Families in Three North Carolina Counties

RALEIGH — Safe Babies Court, a comprehensive new approach in North Carolina to reducing the time children spend in foster care by improving permanency outcomes for infants and toddlers, officially began accepting families this summer in Mitchell, New Hanover, and Yancey counties.

Establishing a Safe Babies Court program in North Carolina was a recommendation of the [Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts](#) in its [final report](#) issued in December 2023. Specifically, the Task Force recommended implementing Safe Babies Court through a three-year, five-pilot site initiative. The pilot sites include Brunswick County, Durham County, Mitchell and Yancey counties, New Hanover County, and a fifth site to be determined.



Safe Babies Court connects children ages 0-3 and their families involved in the child welfare court system with intensive support and services designed to promote healthy child development while working to ensure a safe and timely permanency placement. There are frequent judicial status conferences and family team meetings to provide additional oversight and ensure the family's needs are met and the case is not unnecessarily delayed in the court system.

In July 2023, the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC), in partnership with North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), began working with local stakeholders, including district court judges and directors of county child welfare agencies (DSS), to implement Safe Babies Court in the first two pilot sites – Mitchell and Yancey counties, and New Hanover County. Safe Babies Court is supported by teams of NCAOC staff, DHHS staff, local community coordinators, county child welfare agencies, and the statewide Safe Babies Court Advisory Committee that connects representatives from agencies and professionals working to improve outcomes in abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.

Safe Babies Court received initial funding from the North Carolina General Assembly and grant funds to provide administrative leadership and collaboration with partners in a range of fields across the child welfare system. This collaboration amongst partners in child welfare is critical to children and families' well-being, development, and increased opportunities for long term stability.

"Safe Babies Court presents an incredible opportunity to significantly reduce time to permanence for children in foster care ages 0-3, to positively impact the brain development of the youngest children in foster care by strengthening supportive relationships and providing therapeutic services, and to reduce the risk of further trauma in the child's life. We have the opportunity to reshape child welfare practices for how we respond not only to the youngest children in care, but for all children in care," said Chief District Court Judge Jay Corpening.

"I am excited and proud that Safe Babies Court in Mitchell and Yancey Counties is up and running," said District Court Judge Rebecca Eggers-Gryder. "Safe Babies Court will have a tremendous positive impact on the communities in these counties. It is a collaborative Court that is child centered. This Court will be able to utilize more community supports for the child and their families to not only bring permanence quicker for those families, but also to break generational cycles of trauma which will result in healthier families for generations to come. I am so excited to be a part of this team."

"Accepting young families into Safe Babies Court is a major step for our state and its community partners working together to implement the shared mission of the Chief Justice's ACEs Task Force. This program provides trauma-informed services that improve outcomes for vulnerable children served by our court system," said NCAOC Director Ryan S. Boyce.

Efforts are now underway to launch Safe Babies Court in Brunswick and Durham counties.

Safe Babies Court Resources

[Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts](#)

[All Things Judicial Podcast](#) Profiles Safe Babies Courts (May 2024)

[Sharable Resources on Safe Babies Court](#)

[Judicial Branch to Launch Safe Babies Court Team Pilot Programs](#) (May 2023)

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch

The [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. More than 7,400 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The [Judicial Branch budget for FY 2022–23](#) was \$712.8M, 87% of which is used to pay salaries and 11.5% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives 2.64% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#), providing administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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