

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 12 | AUGUST 5, 2026

EPISODE 1 IS LIVE!

IN THIS ISSUE

In our last newsletter, we announced the teaser for our new podcast, *Off the Record with Dr. Donny and Judge Stephanie*. This week we are pleased to announce that episode 1 is now live! See below for information on the episode, including where to listen.

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EPISODE 1:

IS DIVORCE RIGHT FOR YOU?



**LISTEN ON
SPOTIFY**



**LISTEN ON
APPLE
PODCASTS**



What emotions drive the decision to get divorced? In this episode, we explore how someone knows they're truly ready to end a relationship, the emotional and legal realities of divorce, and what can shape that decision.

WHAT MY SUMMER INTERNS TAUGHT ME

WRITTEN BY JUDGE STEPHANIE J. WILLIAMS

This summer, our court had the privilege of welcoming four interns into our office. One was a rising junior in high school, two were rising college freshman, and one was entering her second year of law school. They arrived at different stages of their educational journeys, with different experiences and aspirations, but each brought something meaningful and unique to our team.



From left to right: Sydney Lee, Judge Williams, Sterling Barrett, Micah Dixon, Nyla Smith



The interns filming a video for socials.

From the beginning, they filled our office with energy, curiosity, and innovation. They brought fresh ideas and a willingness to approach familiar responsibilities in new ways. Their creativity was especially evident in the content they developed for our court's social media platforms and newsletters. They researched topics, wrote articles, created engaging posts, and helped us communicate with the public in ways that were informative, accessible, and relevant.

Their work gave new life to our public outreach. They helped us see that educating the community about the court system does not always have to be formal or complicated. Information can be accurate and substantive while also being creative, engaging, and relatable. Their contributions reminded us of the value of allowing young people not only to participate, but also to lead, create, and shape the way an organization communicates.

Yet, their most significant contribution to our office extended far beyond the projects they completed.

As a family court judge, I regularly encounter cases involving children and adolescents. I hear testimony about their lives, their families, their struggles, and the decisions adults make on their behalf. Having these interns in our office provided an opportunity to hear directly from young people who are part of the same generation as many of the children whose lives are affected by the cases that come before our court.



The interns in action.



The interns assisting with events.

As they observed proceedings involving adolescents, they offered thoughtful and sometimes unexpected insight. They helped me consider how young people might interpret the words, actions, and decisions of the adults around them. Their observations added context to issues that adults may view from a very different perspective.

We had candid conversations about parenting, family relationships, communication, and their personal experiences with the adults in their lives. They spoke openly about what they believe parents and other adults need to understand about young people today. Those conversations were honest, enlightening, and, at times, challenging.

Through those discussions, I had an “aha” moment. I began to understand more deeply that the ways adults connect and interact with young people today cannot simply mirror the ways our parents, educators, employers, and mentors interacted with us. This is not because that way of parenting was inherently wrong, it is because the world in which today’s young people are growing up is fundamentally different.

They are navigating constant access to information, social media, online influences, and pressures that many adults did not experience during their formative years. They are exposed to opinions, expectations, conflict, tragedy, and comparison almost continuously. At the same time, they are adjusting to changing family structures, shifting social expectations, academic pressures, and uncertainty about their futures.

My interns reaffirmed the importance of creating relational experiences rather than merely transactional ones. They want what young people have always wanted—to be loved, protected, guided, and valued. But they also have a profound need to be seen, heard, respected, and included in the narratives that shape their lives. They want adults to listen to understand, rather than simply listen to respond, correct, or instruct.

This does not mean that young people do not need guidance, accountability, structure, or boundaries. They do. However, guidance is most effective when it is grounded in trust and relationship. Structure is more meaningful when young people understand its purpose. Accountability is more likely to produce growth when it is accompanied by compassion, consistency, and an acknowledgment of their perspective. Relationships require time. They require patience, availability, curiosity, and a willingness to engage even when the conversation is uncomfortable. They require adults to ask meaningful questions and then create enough space for young people to answer honestly.

The presence of these four interns changed the atmosphere of our office, but it also changed me. Their perspectives caused me to think differently about how I communicate, how I listen, and how I create space for younger voices. They caused me to practice flexibility, compassion, inclusiveness, and understanding in a different way.



The interns in action. Again.

As the summer came to an end, I found myself hoping that their experience with our court had been as meaningful and enlightening for them as their presence had been for me. They may have entered our office as interns, but they became teachers, innovators, and valued members of our team. Through their questions, honesty, creativity, and perspectives, they challenged me to practice flexibility, compassion, inclusiveness, and understanding in new and more intentional ways. I am better because they were here.

This experience also reminded me that every adult has an opportunity—and a responsibility—to positively influence the young people who cross our paths. Whether they are our children, relatives, students, mentees, interns, employees, or simply young people within our communities, we must be intentional about how we engage them.

Our youth do not merely need us to speak to them; they need us to speak with them. They need to know that they are seen, heard, respected, and included in the conversations and decisions that shape their lives. They need space to contribute their ideas, share their concerns, make mistakes, and discover the value of their own voices.

My charge to each of us is simple: slow down, make the time, ask the questions, and truly listen to the answers. Invite young people into meaningful spaces. Value their perspectives. Challenge them, encourage them, and allow them to challenge us in return. When we invest in authentic relationships with young people, we do more than prepare them for the future—we allow them to help us better understand the present. And in the process of helping them grow, we may discover, as I did this summer, that we are growing too.



Our interns took “inclusion” and “respect” seriously as they each took a seat on the bench...
From left to right: Nyla Smith, Sterling Barrett, Micah Dixon, and Sydney Lee.

BACK TO SCHOOL

It's that time of year... again. Metro Nashville Public Schools and many surrounding counties are back in session on **Tuesday, August 11th**. Get ready for school-year parenting schedules, extra-curriculars, and the general hustle and bustle of the academic year.

In case you missed it, MNPS is changing their start times as outlined below:



- **High schools will start 20 minutes later.**
 - Start: 7:25 a.m.
 - Dismissal: 2:25 p.m.
- **Elementary schools and Early Learning Centers will generally shift 10 minutes later.**
 - Start: 8:10 a.m.
 - Elementary dismissal: 3:10 p.m.
 - Early Learning Center Dismissal: 2:10 p.m.
- **Middle school start and dismissal times will remain the same.**
 - Start: 8:55 a.m.
 - Dismissal: 3:55 p.m.

For most families, the impact will be limited to a 10- or 20-minute adjustment. Many magnet programs, academies, and special program schedules will not change.

Please check the MNPS website for a list of schools whose start times will remain the same. You may view the list [HERE](#) or by scanning the QR code:



ELECTION DAY IS TOMORROW

Didn't get a chance to vote early? You have one more opportunity to have your voice heard! **Election day is TOMORROW, August 6th, 2026.** Primary elections will be held for Governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Tennessee Senate (odd-numbered districts), Tennessee House, and Republican and Democratic State Executive Committees. General elections will be held for vacant state judicial offices and applicable county offices. For more information, click [HERE](#) or scan the QR code.



CALENDAR

August						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
				6		
				20		
	31					

8/6: Election Day

8/20: Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

Dismissal Docket at 2:30 p.m.

8/31: Official end of Judge Williams' 2nd year as Judge.

September						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	7					
				17	18	

9/7: Office Closed for Labor Day

9/17: Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

Dismissal Docket at 2:30 p.m.

9/18: Office Open, No Motion Docket

For a complete view of our regularly scheduled dockets and available Court dates, please see the calendar page on our website by clicking here: [Website Calendar](#) or by scanning the QR code:



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[Judge Stephanie J. Williams](#)

Feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who may be interested. You may also email RebekahLHaralson@jnsnashville.gov to be added to the mailing list.

Additionally, you may view this and all previous newsletters on our website by clicking this link: [Updates and Announcements](#) or by scanning the QR code:

