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Long-overdue Family Court building restores dignity

November 21, 2025

The new Sussex County Family Court building certainly shines with fresh paint, clean sight lines and architectural ambition, but its true value lies in something far less visible – dignity. With the completion of the \$142 million, 107,800-square-foot courthouse in Georgetown, the justice system is signaling an understanding that it must do more than process cases; it must respect the humanity of every person who walks through its courthouse doors.

For years, the old 31,000-square-foot courthouse on The Circle strained under demands it was never built to meet. Outdated by modern safety standards, it forced litigants into close, tense contact, and required court staff and detainees to share elevators and hallways – an arrangement that made no one safer and made an already stressful environment feel even more intimidating. These were not small flaws; they shaped the daily experience of families already navigating some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

The new building corrects these deficiencies with room to breathe, both literally and figuratively. Separate secure corridors, more spacious waiting areas and courtrooms designed to lower emotional temperature reflect an understanding that physical space influences emotional well-being. Chief Judge Michael Newell, who has spent decades in family law, said the goal is simple: If the environment can make people feel a little calmer and a little safer, then the investment is worth it.

It is also worth noting how this courthouse came to be. Planning intensified after Newell became chief judge in 2015, but it grew from years of stakeholder meetings and careful attention to the needs of litigants, attorneys and staff. The result is a facility that is not only a monument to government authority, but also a reminder that courthouses should not stand as symbols of bureaucracy; they should stand as places where people are helped, not overwhelmed.

As the former courthouse is repurposed for other state agencies, Sussex County begins a new chapter. This new Family Court is more than a building; it is a commitment to justice that treats families with the respect they deserve.



EDITORIAL



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