

LOCAL

How new Sussex County Family Court in Georgetown improves experience for public, employees



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Key Points AI-assisted summary

- A new, larger Family Court has opened in Georgetown, Delaware, replacing an older, cramped building.
- The new facility addresses longtime safety concerns by providing separate hallways and elevators for detainees.
- It features more and larger courtrooms, mediation rooms, and dedicated spaces for children.

The new Sussex County Family Court in Georgetown is open.

The 31,000-square foot, dark, cramped building on The Circle has been replaced by a 107,800-square-foot structure with much natural light at 100 E. Market St. However, improving aesthetics wasn't the point.

The new building solves several longtime issues, according to Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell.

"One is adequate space. Space in the courtrooms for our litigants, space in the building for our employees to have a workspace (so) that they're not cramped, and then safety," Newell said. "Safety for the litigants, safety for the employees, safety for the employees that come in. I'm thrilled with it."



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New family courthouse opens in Georgetown

A new family courthouse has opened in Georgetown. The site is about three times the size of the old building.

"It's not going to take away the emotional issues that our litigant

One of the biggest safety issues in the old building was that there were no separate hallways or elevators for detainees – they used the same spaces as the court’s 170 staff members and judges.

The new Family Court features eight courtrooms, compared with the old building’s six, all of which are more than double the size of the old building’s courtrooms. Court mediators used to meet with clients in their offices; now, there are eight large mediation rooms.

The size of the new building, in its waiting areas, hallways and elsewhere, also allows for privacy and separation that wasn’t attainable in the old building.

“Size matters with people in contentious relationships. Space is needed,” Newell said.

The old Family Court building was built in 1988, and since then, the court’s jurisdiction has expanded and its caseload has doubled, according to Delaware Courts spokesman Sean O’Sullivan.

The old building had no lobby, sometimes leaving people out in the elements before they could get through security, while the new building has a spacious lobby. Despite the frequent presence of children, the old building had no children’s spaces, while the new building has areas specifically designed for them, complete with books and toys.

There is one part of the old building that made it to the new building: murals by southern Delaware artist John Donato that children helped him create.

The new Family Court has office space for the Department of Justice, Office of Defense Services and the Office of the Child Advocate. It also has a 400-car parking garage, Georgetown’s first parking structure, but an opening date has not yet been announced.

Planning for the new Family Court started [over a decade ago](#). Ground was broken on the new building in June 2022, with the \$142 million cost funded through the General Assembly.

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