



NEWS FROM:
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Shirk Discusses Juvenile Crime Issues at Accountability Forum *Event organized by community activists deemed 'great success' by attendees, panelists*

Jacksonville, FL: "Getting engaged in the community" is a priority of Fourth Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk because it provides for better communication between elected leaders and the greater constituency. This is the message he delivered to the audience assembled at Milney Auditorium on the campus of Edward Waters College on Thursday evening (1/21/10). The event was called the Accountability Forum, an exercise that organizers intended to better facilitate discussion between local officeholders and the people of Jacksonville.

Shirk was one of 16 panelists that discussed a variety of issues related to crime, public safety, education, housing and elections. Other panelists included the Sheriff, the State Attorney, several members of the City Council, a member of the Duval public school board, the Property Appraiser and the Supervisor of Elections. Several other local, state and federal offices were represented.

The event organized by Eunice Barnum of the Sherwood Forest/Paradise Park Community Association and Lloyd Washington of the Coalition of Presidents of Community Associations began at 5 p.m. with a dinner, followed by a 30 minute panelist reception and ended after a nearly two hour panel discussion. Close to 200 people attended the forum which allowed for the different officeholders to address questions related to their duties. Moderator Dan Evans of *The Florida Star* was billed with the task of keeping the discussion succinct and on topic.

"Like any community, Jacksonville has a lot of problems and it is extremely heartening to see such an outpouring of citizens who want to be part of the solution," said Shirk. "I am proud to have been one of so many fine panelists who represent our community in different capacities. When I was asked my thoughts on preventing juveniles from following a path into crime, I like many others agreed that education is a critical starting point. A priority of mine as Public Defender is to engage in the community and we are continually increasing our efforts of outreach and education through participation in events like the Accountability Forum and work with schools, neighborhood associations and other groups."

Joining Shirk at the event was Assistant Public Defender Melina Buncome-Williams, a senior attorney in his Homicide Unit. As part of the Florida Bar Association Education Committee, Ms. Buncome-Williams is involved with the creation of collateral pieces that the organization distributes to provide better information and education about the legal system. Shirk and Williams provided copies to attendees.

Many of the participants in the Thursday event called it a "great success." Panelists and attendees alike agreed that ongoing discussions like this are important to moving the community forward.

PAGE 2: PHOTOS “Accountability Forum”



(L-R) APD Melina Buncome-Williams, PD Matt Shirk



Matt Shirk with members of SFPPCA



A view of the Panelists at the Accountability Forum



Forum co-organizer, SFPPCA President Eunice Barnum (r)



APD Melina Buncome-Williams visits with panelist Brenda Priestly-Jackson from Duval School Board



Matt Shirk visits with attendees of the Accountability Forum
