



Chief Justice Signs Proclamation Announcing Nebraska Probation Week



In a screenshot of a video of the proceedings, Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Heavican signs a proclamation during a ceremony at the Capitol on Friday, July 17, 2020. (Nebraska Judicial Branch)

By David Golbitz
The Daily Record

Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Heavican signed a proclamation Friday in recognition of the state’s probation system, declaring July 19 through July 25 to be Nebraska Probation Week.

“Everybody on the Supreme Court is extremely appreciative of what you do, and I think I can safely say everybody in the state of Nebraska is extremely thankful for everything that you do,” he said.

The ceremony began with remarks from Justice Jeffrey Funke, who said that the week is meant to “highlight and honor the excellent work of our many probation officers and employees.”

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“Probation personnel are on the front line of the criminal justice system and they work daily to improve the lives of individuals on probation while ensuring community safety,” Funke said.

The state’s probation office, which operates through the Nebraska Judicial Branch, employs 970 staff members whose job it is to “show compassion and caring and still provide tough love” to Nebraska’s nearly 16,000 adults and children who are working their way through the probation system.

The ceremony also included remarks from former probation client Rhonda Nygaard, whose life was turned around in part because of her experience with the Nebraska probation system.

“Through probation and corrections, I saw light at the end of the tunnel,” Nygaard said. “I thought that I had missed the message all those years, but with the help and dedication of probation employees, I turned my whole life around, and it made me want to turn other peoples’ lives around.”

Nygaard, who has been clean for two years, praised the structure probation provided her and is planning to

begin classes in August with the hope of becoming a drug and alcohol counselor.

“I want to change the people who think the last thing they’re going to do is take a drink or a drug,” Nygaard said. “I want the last thing they do to be much more rewarding than that.”

Probation Administrator Deborah Minardi praised the employees whose roles can vary, she said, to include “coach, mentor, advocate, disciplinarian, motivator, career counselor, confidant, parent, teacher, preacher, social worker, law enforcement officer, urine collector, navigator, negotiator, housing specialist, role model and more.”

“Probation staff understand that being on probation is not the easy way, but it is the right way,” Minardi said. “They understand that you can’t change behavior if you don’t replace it with a new behavior. They understand that along the way we all fall, we all need to get up, and we all need a little help now and then.”

Learn more about probation, and watch the proclamation signing ceremony, at supremecourt.nebraska.gov/watch-now-power-probation.