

Court Information Release



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
219 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60604

Release Date:
March 25, 2021

Contact:
Julie Hodek
(312) 435-5693 (phone)
julie_hodek@ilnd.uscourts.gov



Junebug and Birdie, two Bernese Mountain dogs, comfort a victim before she testifies.

Bernese Mountain Dogs Offer Comfort at Dirksen Courthouse

Chicago, Ill. - Junebug and Birdie are two trained therapy dogs that have been working in the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse for several years. When a victim is scheduled to testify before the grand jury, a jury, or at sentencing, Felice Weiler, the Victim Witness Coordinator of the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois, calls Judge Virginia M. Kendall, who

trained the dogs, and asks if they are available. The dogs then accompany the victim in a waiting area to offer comfort and calm during the wait. The dogs do not go into the courtroom for the proceeding; they are merely comfort animals.

“When Junebug and Birdie enter a room, they immediately capture the attention of the victim. Their calm demeanor and beautiful, soft, furry coats seem to absorb all the victim’s worries and fears. It is a magical moment,” said Felice Weiler.

“Bernese Mountain dogs are the perfect breed to offer comfort,” said Judge Kendall who trained the two to work, “They have an uncanny sensitivity to humans who are in need and they will sit on their feet and lean into their legs to show them they are protected.”

Judge Kendall’s dogs work both at the Dirksen Courthouse and at the high school where her husband is the President, Cristo Rey St. Martin College Prep. Cristo Rey is a school for students of limited economic means in Waukegan. The dogs often walk the halls offering comfort to students who are studying or changing classes. They each have their photos and names in every yearbook and carry a school i.d.

When the dogs are not working directly for a witness or victim, they are often seen calming attorneys as they go through the security check in the morning. “They are like magnets,” said Judge Kendall, “Lawyers and staff are just attracted to their calm nature, their size, and of course, their fluffy coat.”

The courthouse dogs were originally approved for work by former Chief Judge Rubén Castillo and are now expanding their time in the courthouse with the approval of Chief Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer.

“In a courthouse that can be austere and intimidating, we have June bug and Birdie---warm, gentle, and comforting. Their calming presence makes even the most frightened among us feel safe,” said Chief Judge Pallmeyer.

##