

North Little Rock Teen court offers constructive sentencing

By Andrew Morgan, League staff



From left, student volunteer prosecutor Khoransea Carter and volunteer judge John Hout listen as North Little Rock Police Officer Mark Stephen testifies during an April 26 session of the North Little Rock Teen Court.

"All rise."

Everyone in the North Little Rock district courtroom heeds the bailiff's instruction as the judge enters the chamber and takes his place behind the bench. The prosecutors, defenders, defendants and jurors are all present, but this isn't your typical day in court.

Although his decisions will be final, today's "judge," John Hout, a deputy prosecuting attorney for Pulaski County, is a volunteer. The bailiff is a local high school student, as are the rest of the participants.

The North Little Rock Teen Court is now in session.

Hout tells the participants that today's proceedings are not to determine the guilt or innocence of

the defendants, but to determine their punishments. Everyone in the courtroom then pledges to not discuss the details of the proceedings outside of the room.

The defendant's infractions, though often minor, are very real. They've gotten in trouble for fighting at school or for engaging in other types of bad behavior for which they will now answer and face a jury of their peers. The sentences handed down typically involve a set amount of community service and essay writing. All defendants are also required to volunteer at least once on the Teen Court jury. It's what the judge calls "constructive" sentencing.