

Biography for Mary Jane McCalla Knisely

A native Montanan, Mary Jane Knisely graduated from Texas Christian University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology before attending law school at the University of Montana. After she received her Juris Doctorate, she returned to Billings to serve as a law clerk for the Hon. Russell K. Fillner, District Court Judge, Thirteenth Judicial District before becoming a Deputy City Attorney for the City of Billings.

During the more than seven years she worked as a criminal prosecutor, she worked on traffic, juvenile, domestic violence, drug-related and DUI cases. As a prosecutor by day, she spent her evenings as a Crisis Counselor for Tumbleweed Runaway Program for youth.

In 1997, Judge Knisely was elected as Billings Municipal Court Judge, a position in which she served for more than 13 years. As Municipal Court Judge, she annually presided over more than 30,000 filed charges, including misdemeanors, minors in possession of alcohol, drugged and impaired driving cases.

In 2010, Judge Knisely was elected to the District Court of Montana Thirteenth Judicial District, Yellowstone County. She assumed general jurisdiction in January of 2011 and became the Chief Presiding Judge for her District in 2014.

In 2011, Judge Knisely was selected as the Region 10 Judicial Outreach Liaison as part of a partnership of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the ABA Judicial Division. This program assists judges in courts of every size and jurisdiction by providing education and information-sharing opportunities related to impaired driving. In May 2012, Judge Knisely joined the faculty of the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. Judge Knisely serves on the Executive Committee for the American Bar Association's National Conference of Specialized Court Judges.

For the last fifteen years, Judge Knisely has assisted in the establishment of treatment courts in Billings. She pioneered the first misdemeanor Drug, DUI and Mental Health Courts in Montana. These Courts were selected as a NDCI Mentor Site. She currently presides over a Felony Impaired Driving Court, known as the STEER Court (Sobriety, Treatment, Education, Excellence, and Rehabilitation), and a Veterans Treatment Court, known as CAMO (Courts Assisting Military Offenders). In May of 2017, February of 2020, and February of 2022, STEER and CAMO were selected as NADCP Academy/Mentor Courts. In December of 2014, Judge Knisely was honored with the Yellowstone County DUI Task Force *Award of Merit*.

Judge Knisely has also worked closely with the Board of Crime Control on the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Subcommittee with the objective of expanding the Subcommittee's work statewide. JDAI's mission is to reduce the number of juveniles who are detained and divert them to community-based programs yielding pro-social outcomes. In 2014, she was appointed to the Montana Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, where her mission is to reduce the number of juveniles detained, diverting them to community-based programs.

Judge Knisely served as Chair of the Montana Supreme Court Commission on Courts of Limited Jurisdiction whose mission is judicial education. Judge Knisely has been an active member of the Montana Supreme Court Equal Justice Task Force and Self-Help Law Center Advisory Board. She received the 2012 State Bar of Montana Distinguished Service Award for her Equal Justice efforts, the 2019 Life Savers Public Service Recognition Honor from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the NADCP ALL RISE 2019 DWI Court Leadership Award. Judge Knisely serves on the Montana Department of Transportation Executive Leadership Committee, the Montana Supreme Court Drug Court Advisory Committee, and the National Rural Justice Collaborative.