Mary Hatwood Futrell Award
She’s a Diligent Protector of Children and Women

The Honorable Karla N. Smith

Her mother was a public school teacher and her father a social worker. And today, Karla N. Smith is a trailblazing judge and a leading advocate for abused women and children in the state of Maryland.

Before becoming a judge, Karla Smith was a prosecutor. She served as Chief of the Family Violence Division of the State’s Attorney’s Office in Montgomery County, MD. She managed a staff of 17 attorneys and support professionals, and tackled cases of child abuse, domestic violence, child pornography, and child abduction. And even though Karla Smith has seen the worst that humanity has to offer, she’s remains hopeful abuse can be reduced.

“Nobody ever sits down with kids and says—truly says to them—this is your body. This is okay behavior, this is not okay behavior.”

What’s more, Karla Smith has shown a keen interest in helping girls navigate the difficult teen years. She developed a Montgomery County Public Schools-approved Healthy Teen Dating Curriculum, which is still being used today to teach signs of a potentially unhealthy/dangerous relationship. She also runs Preparing for Success, a one-day conference for high school-aged girls to encourage the girls to begin thinking about their lives once they graduate from high school and become adults. Judge Smith also mentors young girls about job searching, money management and life skills.

Karla Smith was the first African American Woman to be appointed as a Montgomery County District Court Judge. Now she is a Circuit Court Judge. She has been instrumental in the creation of the Montgomery County Family Justice Center—a state-of-the-art facility that provides wraparound services for domestic abuse victims—assistance in obtaining protective orders, legal aide, employment assistance, emergency medical care, counseling, and access to law enforcement agencies.

She was also instrumental in Maryland passing a law criminalizing child neglect, the most prevalent form of child maltreatment. Her community is a kinder, safer place today because of the Honorable Karla Smith.