



Kansas
Judicial Branch

State of the Judiciary

2023 Annual Report



On the cover

Top row, from left: Judge Kathryn Gardner, Kansas Court of Appeals, speaks to a group of international officers in the Kansas Supreme Court courtroom; District Judge Cheryl Rios, 3rd Judicial District (Shawnee County); and District Judge Jeffrey Larson, 5th Judicial District (Lyon County).

Bottom row, from left: District Magistrate Judge Kevin Kimball, 4th Judicial District (Franklin County); District Magistrate Judge Angela Anderson, 2nd Judicial District (Wabaunsee County); and District Judge Keven O'Grady, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County).

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State of the Judiciary
2023 Annual Report
Chief Justice Marla Luckert
Submitted under K.S.A. 20-320

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Introduction

Dear Governor Kelly, Chair Warren, and Chair Patton:

As chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, I submit this report highlighting Kansas judicial branch 2022 accomplishments. The past three years brought challenges and rapid change to court operations. They also spurred innovation throughout our judicial system.

Last year, I spoke about resiliency and perseverance in the judicial branch workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am incredibly proud of judicial branch employees for adapting to changing conditions, innovating to improve court processes, and ensuring all Kansans continued to have access to their courts. I would be remiss if I did not also mention that constant change and innovation took a toll on Kansas judges and employees. Through it all, they continued to provide outstanding service to the people of Kansas.

In 2022, the judicial branch evaluated the rapid change that took place in 2020 and 2021 to determine whether reengineered work processes forced by the pandemic should continue. During the analysis, the court system continued to innovate to improve access to justice, fine-tune current procedures, enhance IT security, update technology, and create innovative programs to address the needs of Kansas court users. These initiatives were only possible through the hard work and dedication of Kansas judges, court employees, and Office of Judicial Administration staff.

Throughout this past year, employees and judges remained committed to improving processes and transforming the judicial branch landscape. Their continued tenacity and creativity remind me of



Chief Justice Marla Luckert

a Kansan who was a trailblazer and overcame limitations.

Last summer, the Amelia Earhart statue was unveiled at the National Statuary Hall inside the United States Capitol. Each state is allowed two statues, and I am pleased to be represented by such a courageous, daring woman.

Earhart earned her place as a trailblazer in American history by setting aviation records, bridging the gender gap in American life, and serving her country as a military nurse and social worker. This same brave, adventurous spirit energizes the judicial



From left: Justice K.J. Wall, Justice Caleb Stegall, Justice Eric Rosen, Chief Justice Marla Luckert, Justice Dan Biles, Justice Evelyn Wilson, and Justice Melissa Standridge at the Supreme Court's special session April 6 at the Great Bend Events Center.

branch as our judges and employees continuously seek new ways to bridge gaps in access to justice and to efficiently deliver a core function of government.

This annual report highlights creative initiatives developed by judges and judicial branch employees in collaboration with Kansas judicial branch stakeholders. I begin by sharing “Profiles in Justice” to highlight ingenuity and change throughout the state. These profiles represent a mere fraction of the incredible work the judicial branch does every day to serve Kansans. I then spotlight “Progress Through Service” with examples of projects and programs led by Supreme Court committees and the Office of Judicial Administration. Lastly, I provide an overview of judicial branch administration, budget, and case statistics.

As you know, our prior budget requests focused on adequate, market-rate pay for court employees and judges that would make these positions competitive in the legal job market. On behalf of the entire judicial

branch, I express deep gratitude for the Legislature’s work over the last two sessions to strengthen our branch of Kansas government through historic appropriations. In fiscal years 2022 and 2023, you and your colleagues brought employee wages to fiscal year 2021 market rates and took tremendous steps to begin to address uncompetitive judge pay. You added critical court services officer (sometimes referred to as probation officer) and judge positions. And you voted to shift the judiciary away from unreliable fee funding sources. We are incredibly grateful for your commitment and transformative action.

Earhart once said, “The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity.”

You, judges, and judicial branch employees have acted. This report reflects some of those actions and also reflects the tenacity of our judges and judicial branch employees who continue each day to improve the Kansas judicial system for all.



Profiles in Justice

Kansas judges provide their communities and the people and businesses of Kansas a stable, reliable court system.

Judges improve access through new services and court programs. They also adopt strategies to process cases more efficiently.

A few of these judges are featured here, but there are many more like them in communities across Kansas.

District Judge Robert Wonnell, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County), speaks to attendees of the 2022 Mental Health Summit April 13 and 14 in Topeka.

A woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top, is speaking at a podium. She has her hands raised in a gesturing motion. The podium is equipped with several microphones. The background is dark with some blue lighting. An American flag is partially visible on the right side.

2022 Mental Health Summit

Partnering to improve court and community response to behavioral health issues

On April 13 and 14, 2022, the judicial branch hosted the Kansas Mental Health Summit. The summit brought together local and national speakers to educate and inform more than 600 participants. The program highlighted ways each stakeholder in the Kansas judicial process can act to improve the court's response to mental health issues.

The summit opened with leaders from all three branches of Kansas government—Governor Laura Kelly, President of the Senate Ty Masterson, Speaker of the House Ron Ryckman Jr. and me—expressing support for improving the state's response to mental health issues in the justice system. Each leader encouraged attendees to use

the conference as a launching point for innovative change to make justice accessible to all, including those with behavioral health issues.

District Judge Robert Wonnell of Johnson County was inspired to plan the Kansas summit after attending a regional conference organized by the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness. Following that model, attendees of the Mental Health Summit examined how Kansas could better respond at each step of the Sequential Intercept Model, which details how people with mental and substance abuse disorders encounter and move through the criminal justice system.



All 31 judicial districts were represented at the summit, ensuring all Kansans will experience its far-reaching effects. Speakers and attendees included legislators, state executive branch representatives, judges, court services officers, court administrators, law enforcement, prosecutors, community corrections officers, professors, national technical assistance providers, first responders, jail officials, hospital representatives, behavioral health providers, interested community members, and county commissioners.

The summit was a catalyst, not a conclusion. It sparked momentum to determine how Kansas can best address behavioral health issues experienced

Above: Chief Justice Marla Luckert (far left) gives opening remarks at the summit. Also speaking that day were Governor Laura Kelly, President of the Senate Ty Masterson, and Speaker of the House Ron Ryckman Jr.

by some parties involved in the justice system. It produced a state-level, multibranch community of practice that will serve as a conduit to share information and best practices to appropriate stakeholders and governing bodies across the state.

The planning committee will consider recommendations to present to the Legislature, court system, executive branch, and county governments. Community of practice committees also exist at judicial district or county levels to promote local action.



Justice K.J. Wall, center, speaks to the Rural Justice Initiative Committee at its kickoff meeting December 1. He is joined by Chief Justice Marla Luckert to his left and Laurel Klein Searles from the Office of Judicial Administration to his right.

Initiative looks at unmet legal needs in rural areas

Rural judges and attorneys have long noted our rural communities face a shrinking number of attorneys. Sadly, our rural legal communities report this shortage is undermining access to justice, jeopardizing many Kansans' ability to obtain legal representation and making it increasingly difficult for courts to fairly and timely process cases.

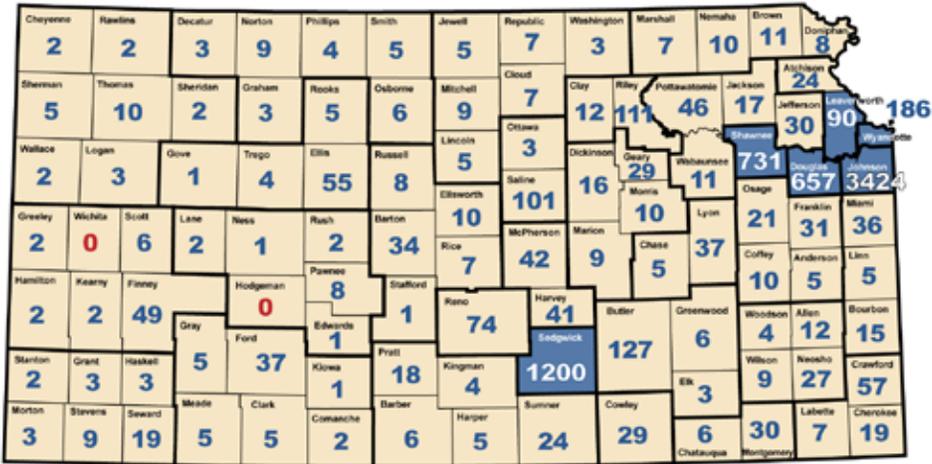
The 2020 census counted almost 3 million Kansans, 57 percent of which lived in six counties—Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte. Eighty percent of all active Kansas attorneys live within the same six counties. This leaves only 20 percent of all active Kansas attorneys, less than 1,600 in number, to serve



2 counties with no attorneys

16 counties with 1 or 2 attorneys

Kansas attorney distribution as of November 2022



Urban counties are where 80% of Kansas attorneys live. The same counties are home to 50% of Kansans. Counties are grouped by judicial district. Rural counties Urban counties

the 1.255 million Kansans living in the remaining 99 counties. Left unaddressed, this problem will only worsen as trends suggest younger attorneys are moving to our state’s urban centers while the attorney population in rural Kansas continues to dwindle.

The access to justice gap caused by the scarcity of attorneys in much of Kansas led the Supreme Court to establish the Rural Justice Initiative Committee. Members include judges, legislators, attorneys, business organizations, higher education representatives, and nonprofits. These Kansans share an interest in strengthening access to justice in our rural communities.

The committee’s duties include identifying unmet legal needs across Kansas, studying programs designed to recruit professionals to rural areas, examining strategies to provide attorney services in underserved areas, and recommending changes in the law to improve the availability of attorney services for rural Kansans.

The Supreme Court directed the committee to deliver its initial recommendations by spring 2024.

Other speakers at the kickoff meeting, from far left: Senator Elaine Bowers, Representative Tory Marie Blew, Alan Cobb, Kansas Chamber of Commerce, and Wendee Grady, Kansas Farm Bureau.





District Judge Wesley Griffin, 29th Judicial District (Wyandotte County), congratulates a drug court graduate.

Specialty courts change lives

Specialty courts, also known as problem-solving courts, continue to positively impact our communities. These courts use therapeutic or problem-solving methods to address underlying factors such as mental illness or addiction that may contribute to a person's involvement in the court system.

District court judges who run specialty courts collaborate with a team of prosecutors, therapists, physicians, probation officers, educators, and other community stakeholders to develop programs to lead people out of a cycle of repeat encounters with the justice system. The specialty court team arranges treatment, periodic mandatory alcohol or drug testing, community supervision, appropriate sanctions and incentives, and other rigorous programming the participant must complete. Specialty courts keep participants at home, employed, and supporting their families while saving the cost of incarceration and other related home-based support.

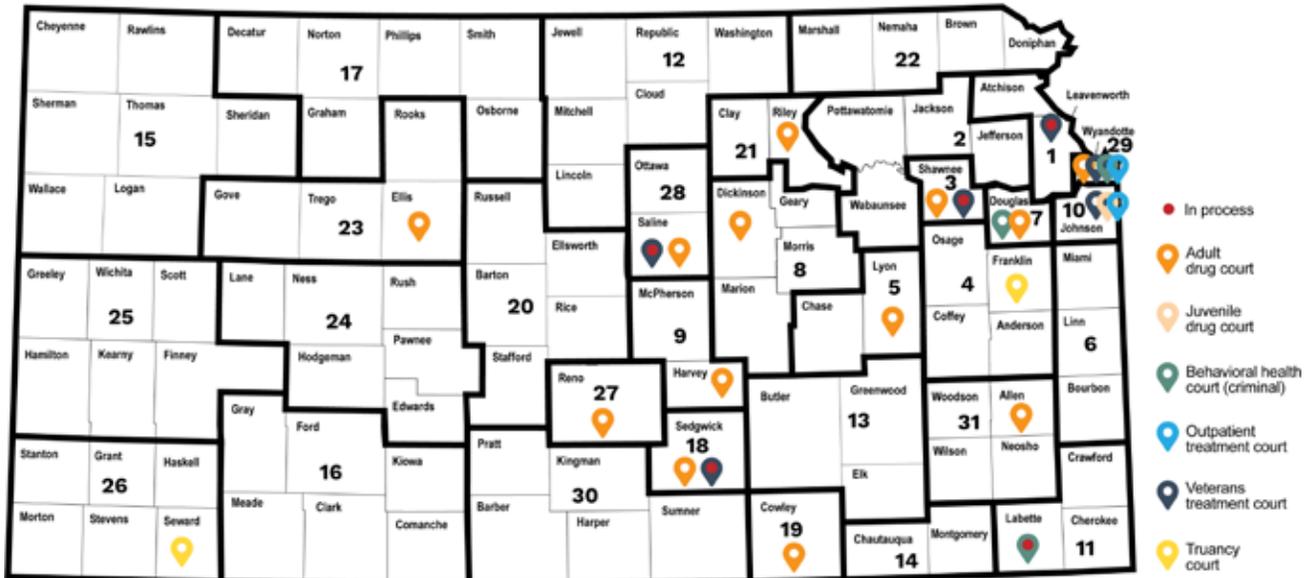
I thank the district court judges who create and maintain a specialty court. They take on these

time-consuming assignments beyond their other judicial duties and responsibilities. They have grown these dockets because people from their community appear before them who are struggling with alcohol and drug addiction or behavioral health issues that led to criminal acts. Or they see a defendant whose military service has caused behavioral health wounds that need attention.

These programs are successful and have a profound impact on the people involved. Every year judges and communities celebrate many specialty court graduations. Graduates proudly stand before their families, friends, peers, probation officers, and sometimes the law enforcement officials who originally arrested them. They thank them for their support and guidance through the hard path overcoming the root cause of behavior that led to their court involvement.

We continue to expand these programs across the state. Twelve districts operate addiction (drug or alcohol) courts. Veterans treatment courts now operate in Johnson and Wyandotte counties. Plans

Kansas specialty courts as of December 2022



The map above shows existing specialty courts and specialty courts in the planning phase in Kansas. It includes two new veterans treatment courts. One is in Shawnee County and it started taking applications in December 2022. Another is in Sedgwick County, and it is expected to launch in January 2023. Both new veterans treatment courts benefited from federal grant dollars awarded to the judicial branch in 2022.

are underway to start veterans treatment courts in Leavenworth, Saline, Sedgwick, and Shawnee counties. Two counties—Douglas and Wyandotte—operate criminal behavioral health courts. And Labette County will soon begin a behavioral health court. On the civil side, Johnson and Wyandotte counties operate assisted outpatient treatment courts that deliver outpatient treatment under court order to adults with severe mental illness who meet specific criteria. The behavioral health and assisted outpatient treatment court provide supportive treatment intervention and establish a treatment team, including the district attorney’s office, county mental health, court services, and judges. Other judicial districts are developing these dockets; six are working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association to develop outpatient treatment courts.

As I explain in more detail later in this report, a recently created Specialty Court Funding Advisory Committee will work to identify and recommend additional specialty court funding—the principal hurdle to expanding these dockets.

District Judge Jennifer Myers, 29th Judicial District (Wyandotte County), congratulates drug court graduates.





Like all chief judges, Chief Judge Rene Young, 28th Judicial District (Saline County), has administrative duties that include case assignments for judges in her district.

New judgeships bring relief to 28th Judicial District

Last year, you granted our budget enhancement request for 23 new judge positions. These are the first new judge positions authorized since 2008. When we reported a persistent and growing need for more judges, you responded and approved our funding request. We are grateful for your support. These new judges will have a tremendous impact on Kansas communities. I want to highlight one such example.

The 28th Judicial District is a midsized district composed of Saline and Ottawa counties. Saline County had an urgent need for more judges based

on the number and type of cases filed there. Chief Judge Rene Young presides over the 28th Judicial District. In addition to her trial court duties, Chief Judge Young is also responsible for administrative duties tied to operating the 28th Judicial District. Like all chief judges, she makes case assignments and ensures a fair and efficient workload for judges in the district.

Before new judges were added, the Saline County caseload required Chief Judge Young and three other district judges to work six or seven days a week, even after assigning senior judges and the

magistrate judge from Ottawa County to help with Saline County cases. The high volume also required hiring a pro tem judge to handle a massive traffic docket and a small claims docket.

The Saline County criminal docket exceeded trial capacity. While considered a midsized county, it has a rising criminal caseload. Saline County's population is just over 54,000, and it sits on the intersection of two major highways - Interstate 70 and Interstate 135.

Chief Judge Young notes this geographic location increases already widespread problems of drug crimes, which prompt other violent crimes like robberies. As a result, three current district judge dockets are mostly criminal. It is common to "stack" seven jury trials, Monday through Friday of a jury trial week. "Stacking" means to schedule multiple jury trials for the same time, with the cases stacked by priority. If the priority case settles, the second case in the stack proceeds to trial. This process can resolve cases, but it puts an incredible strain on prosecutors,

defense attorneys, and judges who must prepare for multiple high-level cases at the same time.

You responded to needs in the 28th Judicial District by locating 3 of the 23 new judgeships authorized in 2022 in this district. Two are district judges and one is a district magistrate judge. The 28th Judicial District will benefit from the additional judges who will provide urgently needed help to lighten current caseloads for individual judges. Also, these new judgeships will allow judges to expand their dockets to include new initiatives such as specialty courts. The 28th Judicial District currently operates a drug court and now plans to add a veterans treatment court later this year. After that, Chief Judge Young hopes to add a behavioral health court. The 28th Judicial District exemplifies how your funding of new judgeships benefits court users and Kansas communities.

District Judge Amy Taylor Norton is helped into her robe during her swearing-in ceremony.

23 new judge posts in 2022

first new judge posts since **2008**

3 new judge posts in the 28th Judicial District





Award-winning service

When you walk into the glass-enclosed, state-of-the-art Johnson County District Court self-help center, it's hard to imagine its humble start: a basement corner, folding tables and chairs, and a couple computers. These meager resources were all Judge Keven M.P. O'Grady had to work with when the self-help center was first created for people who come to court without an attorney.

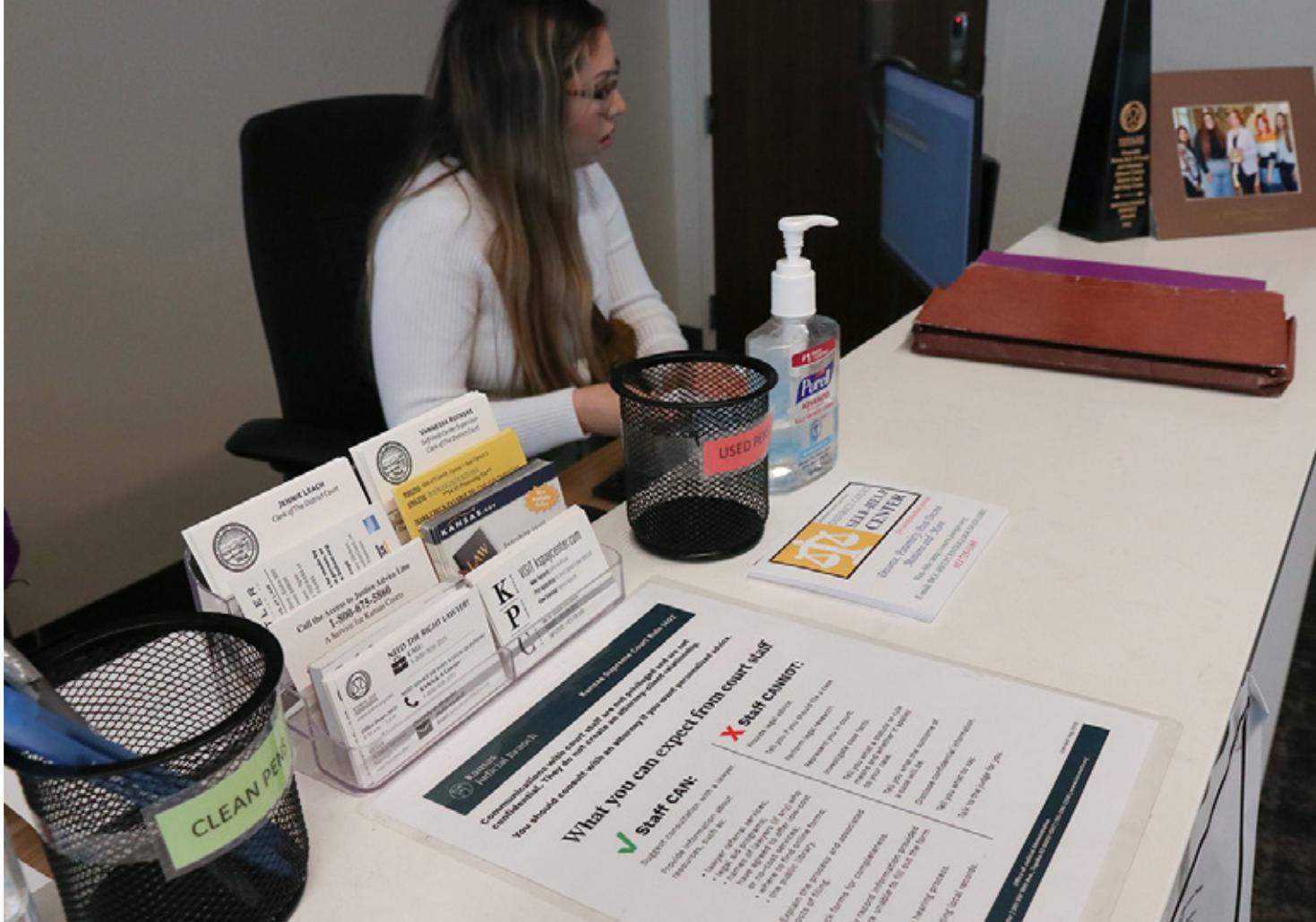
Judge O'Grady had not been a judge long when he found others who wanted to help him fulfill the vision for the self-help center. Judges, clerks, and community stakeholders were willing partners because they recognized an unmet need. And like all good ideas, one thing led to another.

First, Judge O'Grady shared his experience starting the self-help center in a 2015 article published in

the American Judges Association's journal, *Court Review*. It continues to serve as a reference for courts in the early stages of starting their own self-help centers.

Next were easy-to-understand forms Judge O'Grady says are the bedrock of the self-help center. The forms were later used by the Kansas Supreme Court Access to Justice Committee as a model to develop forms for use in courts statewide by people who do not have an attorney.

After that, the center added a court navigator position, hired to connect court users with needed community and dispute resolution services. It was the first position of its kind in a Kansas court, and its creation acknowledged that legal needs are often intertwined with basic life needs.



Facing page: District Judge Keven O’Grady, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County), and Vanessa Rockers, self-help center supervisor, at entrance to self-help center in Johnson County Courthouse. Above: Resources on counter at entrance to self-help center.

In 2016, Judge O’Grady worked with self-help center staff to begin night court one evening a month for people who struggle to get to the courthouse during the day. This step outside familiar processes made it easier to transition to virtual court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, the self-help center gets about 25 visitors a day. It also fields more than 100 emails a day, a number that grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. All told, the center estimates it has helped resolve more than 31,000 requests for help since its inception in 2014.

Vanessa Rockers is the self-help center supervisor. She keeps track of the type of help people ask for and she trains people who work in the center to answer questions without giving legal advice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she made sure more court forms were available online, including packets of forms for common case types.

Vanessa also schedules attorneys who work in the self-help center a few hours a week, whether through a contract with Kansas Legal Services or as volunteers. People who do not have an attorney can consult with one in the self-help center at no cost. Vanessa will summarize what has transpired before the consult takes place to make efficient use of the attorney’s limited time.

When talking about the self-help center, Judge O’Grady likes to report it has “more hugs per square foot than any other space in the courthouse.”

Judge O’Grady was presented the National Center for State Courts 2022 Mary C. McQueen Award for “extraordinary contributions to improving the administration of justice at the local, state, or national level for a sustained period of time.” But he is quick to say credit must be shared with all the people who helped him bring these projects to fruition.



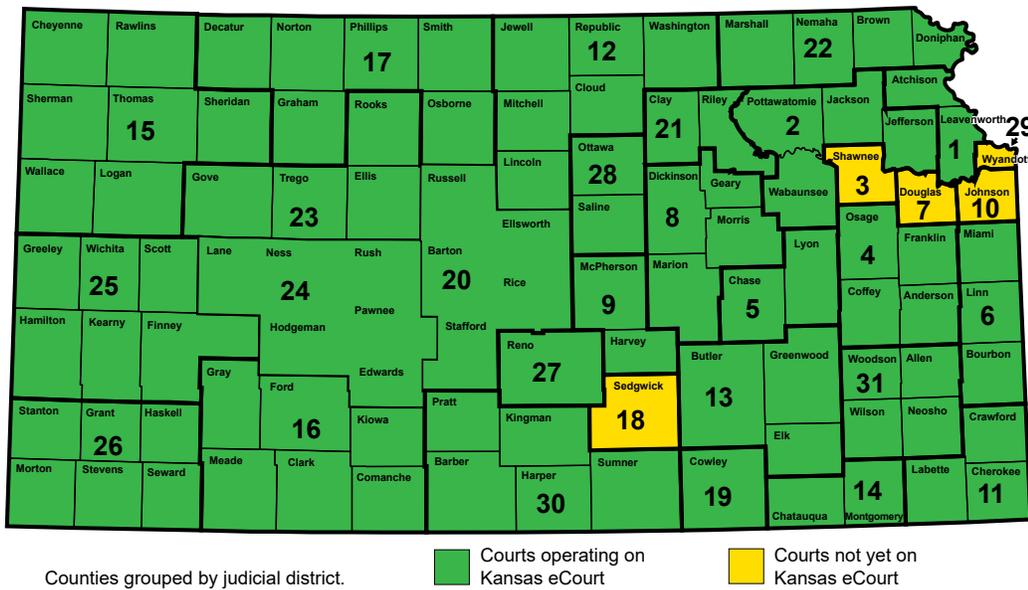
Progress Through Service

Our courts strive to fulfill a core function of government by providing high-quality, efficient service while also being good stewards of public resources.

This section highlights projects that demonstrate how the judicial branch is improving the court system to better serve court users.

Vannessa Rockers, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County) helps a visitor in the Johnson County District Court self-help center.

Kansas eCourt case management system rollout status



In 2023, we will add the appellate courts and four trial courts to the new case management system. The go-live date for the 10th Judicial District (Johnson County) will be in 2024.

Kansas eCourt case management system

Kansas courts are undergoing significant modernization through the rollout of the Kansas eCourt case management system. The new system now operates in 100 of Kansas' 105 counties, which represent about half of our statewide trial court caseload.

The appellate courts and five judicial districts continue to operate on other case management systems, but most will transition to the Kansas eCourt case management system in 2023. Trial courts in the 3rd Judicial District (Shawnee County), 7th Judicial District (Douglas County), 10th Judicial District (Johnson County), 18th Judicial District (Sedgwick County), and 29th Judicial District (Wyandotte County) process half of cases filed in trial courts statewide. This large volume of cases makes the transition to the Kansas eCourt case management system an enormous lift for district courts and Office of Judicial Administration staff and the many stakeholders who are building interfaces with the system. Our goal is to complete the rollout in 2023 for all remaining trial courts except the one in Johnson County, which is slated to move to the new system in 2024.

This rollout is key to the judicial branch strategic goal to harness and make efficient, effective use of technology. The Kansas eCourt case management system improves case processing between district and appellate courts, and it fosters greater efficiency through workshare between district courts, particularly among clerks and court services officers. Through the new case management system, we aim to improve how we collect, store, retrieve, and analyze data; improve data quality and integrity; and enhance data sharing between governmental entities.

This transition centralizes judicial branch case management and document management. It also safeguards public funds. As courts are brought onto the Kansas eCourt case management system, payment processing shifts to the central payment center in the Office of Judicial Administration. Centralizing this function provides important financial safeguards for the judicial branch and it allows courts to focus on case management. The central payment center within the Office of Judicial Administration is responsible for overseeing nearly all financial transactions for all courts on the eCourt case management system, including monthly reconciliations, check writing and delivery, payment processing, unclaimed property submissions, and scheduling collections and noncompliance jobs.

The case management system also provides statewide access to public court case information and records through the Kansas District Court Public Access Portal. Using the portal, a person can search for and access public case information and documents online for free. Before, with few exceptions, searching and accessing public documents had to be done at a courthouse and each courthouse had access to only those cases filed in that court.

Enhanced access to case information is possible for some stakeholders, such as county and district attorneys, sheriffs, court trustees, and individual attorneys. In some instances, stakeholders will be able to integrate case management systems

used in their offices with the Kansas eCourt case management system for a seamless data exchange.

The judicial branch is also in the process of implementing a supervision module to complement the eCourt case management system. It provides a unified supervision module for our court services officers. It will help court services officers track each step in the probation process and enhance data collection and reporting. The supervision module is in use in more than half of Kansas courts and is being rolled out to all other courts.

District courts and the Office of Judicial Administration have worked tirelessly to ensure a smooth transition for the districts brought onto the new case management system. Office of Judicial Administration staff helped each court prepare for the transition through onsite visits, training, and coordination with our vendor's staff. We are proud of the progress we have made and look forward to seeing the eCourt case management system and supervision module operational in all Kansas courts.

Eviction resolution program

The Sedgwick County District Court is one of a dozen jurisdictions nationwide to benefit from a grant to develop an eviction resolution program. The \$261,000 grant was awarded to the Office of Judicial Administration to implement the program in Sedgwick County. The award was made through a competitive application and review process by an advisory council led by the National Center for State Courts.

Sedgwick County District Court has one of the largest eviction dockets in the state. The grant provides initial funding for a program manager who will



Eviction Resolution Program
18th Judicial District

If you are behind on rent or have received an eviction notice from your landlord, take action as soon as possible!

Why Us
Staff at the Eviction Resolution Program can help explain the court process and connect you with community programs and services that may be able to help. This could include mediation, which is a chance for a tenant and landlord to work with a neutral party to reach an agreement.

Contact Us
Call 316-660-5659
Email ERP@kscourts.org
Visit www.dc18.org/evictions

Get Help
Legal Advice
Kansas Legal Services (KLS) may be able to provide free legal advice to help you understand your rights.
Call 316-267-3975 or 1-800-723-6953
Visit www.kansaslegalservices.org

- KLS attorneys are also available at Sedgwick County Law Library Self-Help Center 225 N Market, Suite 210 Wichita, KS 67202
- Tuesdays 8:30 a.m.-12:30pm (by appointment)
- Wednesdays 12:30p.m.-4 p.m. (walk-ins)

 **Kansas Judicial Branch**

develop the voluntary eviction resolution program. The program manager will assist with early case resolution by connecting property owners and tenants to resources, including legal help, rental assistance, and materials to help them better understand eviction law and the legal process. The National Center for State Courts will provide technical assistance for this project to both the Office of Judicial Administration and the district court.

Stable housing is essential for all Kansans, and I am eager to see the results of this program. The eviction resolution program will provide property owners and tenants with the time, information, and resources to resolve cases earlier in the legal process with less litigation. Information and educational resources developed through the grant project will be made available to all Kansas courts, ultimately benefitting every community statewide. This grant project directly reflects recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices for Eviction Proceedings described later in this report.

Access to justice initiatives

The Kansas Supreme Court's Access to Justice Committee and the Trial Court Services department in the Office of Judicial Administration make recommendations to the Supreme Court about how to reduce potential barriers to equal access to justice, increase resources available for legal services for self-represented litigants in civil cases, and improve planning and coordination of legal services delivery. These groups implemented several projects this year.

Legal forms project

Legal forms are developed in collaboration with the Kansas Judicial Council. These forms are available for free to help judges, attorneys, and people who represent themselves in court, referred to as pro se litigants. The Access to Justice Committee is collaborating with the Judicial Council on an ongoing

project to update, simplify, and create forms that are accessible to pro se litigants. Many Chapter 61 forms were simplified in 2022, including general pleadings and those for eviction and small claims. The Judicial Council also published new generic motion and change of contact information forms.

Stanford Filing Fairness Project

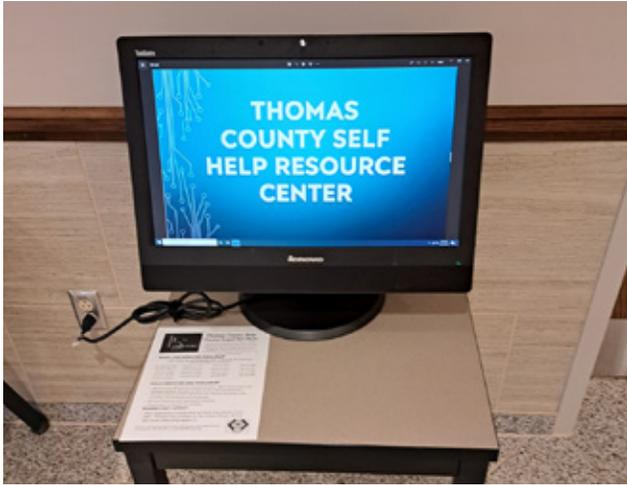
In March 2022, Justice Evelyn Wilson and Sarah Hoskinson, director of access to justice in the Office of Judicial Administration, attended the initial convening of the Stanford Filing Fairness Project. Kansas is among six states participating in the project. The goal is to expand electronic filing options for pro se litigants and standardize forms. Standardizing forms is an incentive for technology providers to develop these options. Stanford identifies the project as an “ambitious, multi-jurisdictional effort to simplify court filing processes and improve access to and the administration of justice by leveraging readily available technology.”

Self-help centers

Many district courts provide self-help centers where individuals can access forms and other information at their local courthouse. In 2022, Kansas Legal Services began offering regularly scheduled legal aid days at self-help centers in eight counties—Wyandotte, Johnson, Harvey, Thomas, Miami, Sedgwick, Franklin, and Ellis. These services were made possible, at least in part, through access to justice grant funding administered by the Office of Judicial Administration. Additionally, Bourbon County opened a new self-help center.

Access to Justice Advice Line

Kansas Legal Services runs a grant-funded phone line to give brief advice to court users with questions about legal proceedings, completing forms, and related topics. In years past, when someone called the advice line, Kansas Legal Services screened for income eligibility and then provided service to those eligible under grant guidelines set by the Supreme Court. In 2022, the Supreme Court approved removing the income restrictions on the advice line



Above left and right: The Thomas County District Court opened its self-help resource center in 2022.

to increase the efficiency with which callers are provided information. This helpful tool can now serve all Kansans who choose to reach out.

Upgrades to Kansas Protection Order Portal

In 2021, the judicial branch used a Federal Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding grant to launch the Kansas Protection Order Portal, or KSPOP. The portal is an online tool a person can use to seek protection without visiting a courthouse, as many may lack transportation or feel unsafe leaving home.

In 2022, KSPOP was upgraded in several ways. Key forms were modified to make petitions easier to read. The portal can also now be viewed in Spanish, and filers can shift to the Spanish version of the portal with a click of a button. Petitions filed through KSPOP are now delivered by electronic filing rather than email. This further integrates KSPOP with the new eCourt case management system and improves upon efficient, reliable electronic delivery processes. Petitioners can also use the portal to notify the court they need an interpreter at a protection order hearing.



The Office of Judicial Administration also created resources in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to help petitioners understand the process, including a “How to Use KSPOP” video; a “What Happens at your Protection Hearing” video; and a protection order flowchart that provides an overview of the process.

Education programming

The judicial branch is committed to serving as a resource for the legal community and to providing best practices training to its workforce. Providing continuing education to staff and stakeholders across Kansas is a priority for Supreme Court committees and our education team. While many of these trainings happen in person, our staff use webinars to reach as many people as possible statewide; included are attorneys, social workers, mediators, and other court stakeholders. In addition to hundreds of hours of training traditionally provided to municipal and state judges and judicial branch employees, Supreme Court committees and the Office of Judicial Administration provided trainings on several timely topics. What follows is a sampling of the trainings and educational programs provided by the Office of Judicial Administration and Supreme Court committees over the past year.

CINC Nuts and Bolts Training In fall 2022, the Office of Judicial Administration hosted a Child in Need of Care (CINC) Nuts and Bolts webinar



In a video on the Kansas Protection Order Portal, Chief Judge Amy Harth, 6th Judicial District (Miami County), describes what happens in a protection order hearing. It's one of two videos posted on the portal in 2022. The other describes how to use the portal.

series for judges who hear these cases. The series consisted of six one-hour webinars. CINC cases involve a child under age 18 who is without adequate parental care; has been physically, mentally, or emotionally abused or neglected; or is in court-ordered placement.

CINC cases may involve a variety of laws, including the Indian Child Welfare Act or statutes in other states. During the webinar series, judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, and representatives from the Department for Children and Families and the Office of Judicial Administration addressed this legal interplay. The series gave an overview of the CINC process, permanency hearings, relinquishment of rights, termination of parental rights, post-termination proceedings, and permanency options.

Bioethics Mediation Judge Keven O'Grady, Johnson County District Court, and Victoria Kumorowski, an attorney and adjunct professor at Muskingum University and Rockhurst University, provided information on the use of bioethics

mediation to promote amicable resolution of legal and ethical conflicts raised by advances in medical, reproductive, and genetic technology.

The Kansas judicial branch serves as a continuing education resource for the legal community and provides best practices training to its workforce.

Restorative Justice Practices in Kansas

Judge O'Grady and members of the Advisory Council on Dispute Resolution provided information about the use of restorative justice practices in Kansas, the history of restorative justice, and best practices.

Practical Solutions for De-escalating Tense Situations The Access to Justice Committee provided a broad overview of the effects of trauma on the brain, components of the de-escalation process, and how to avoid staff burnout. District court judges, a court administrator, and a court services officer provided real world examples of tense situations in the courtroom and how to resolve them.

Legal Information vs. Legal Advice The Access to Justice Committee presented this webinar on how to give information to a pro se litigant and how to draw the line between providing legal information and legal advice.

Traffic Pass The Access to Justice Committee discussed an innovative program the Wyandotte County District Court is using to help people who need to resolve pending traffic citations. The webinar explained how courts can develop similar programs in other parts of the state.

Small Claims Mediation The Advisory Council on Dispute Resolution presented a training about the innovative Johnson County small claims mediation program. The training featured District Magistrate Judge Robert Scott and several volunteer mediators who participate in the project.

Best Practices in Child Welfare Law Twice a year, the Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning and the Office of Judicial Administration offer training on topics related to improving the child welfare system. In April, almost 700 stakeholders attended webinars about reasonable efforts, relative placement, and the impact of implicit bias. In August, over 500 stakeholders learned about procedural fairness in child in need of care cases and termination of parental rights. Topics for 2023 include substance use disorders and older youth in foster care.

Juvenile Justice Training The Office of Judicial Administration Trial Court Services department presented a webinar on childhood trauma and the effect of toxic stress in juvenile

court cases. It covered the correlation between childhood toxic stress and a higher risk of juvenile justice involvement. This training was based on the Office of Judicial Administration training protocol created under K.S.A. 20-318a. Almost 600 people participated. Four more trainings are planned for 2024.

Supreme Court committees

The Supreme Court and Office of Judicial Administration staff convene many committees on various topics. Office of Judicial Administration staff provide guidance to these committees, which are composed of relevant stakeholders. The committees undertake an in-depth analysis of their subject matter and provide substantive recommendations to improve legal practices and further access to justice measures. This section highlights a few committees working on special projects.

Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices for Eviction Proceedings

In October 2021, the Supreme Court created the Ad Hoc Committee on Best Practices for Eviction Proceedings. The Supreme Court asked the committee to study eviction proceedings with the goals of reducing court filings, quickly resolving cases, and enhancing housing stability.

The committee includes a wide variety of people with expertise in housing and evictions and perspectives on property owner and tenant concerns. This group compared pre-pandemic case statistics to filings during the pandemic and immediately after the federal eviction moratoria ended. This review guided the committee's discussions about how to best address challenges and barriers that cause parties to file for evictions and raise awareness about Kansas emergency rental assistance funds.

The committee released its initial report in April 2022. It included both short- and long-term

recommendations. The Supreme Court authorized the committee to continue its work and move forward with its short-term recommendations, which include:

- developing a model voluntary eviction resolution program that district courts may implement to provide an alternative to eviction;
- creating videos to explain the eviction process;
- developing reference materials for judges on best practices for eviction proceedings; and
- amending forms to provide more information on the eviction process.

This committee will continue to meet and work to implement these recommendations. I am extremely thankful for the committee's diligence and dedication to this subject.

Specialty court committees

Last year, the Supreme Court established the Specialty Court Committee to make recommendations about developing and administering specialty courts in Kansas. The committee is examining subject matter considerations to recommend to the Supreme Court, but sufficient funding remains one of the biggest barriers to starting and continuing specialty courts.

To address the funding gap our specialty courts encounter, the judicial branch has worked to identify and secure grant opportunities. This year, the state of Kansas and individual district courts were awarded several grants for specialty court operations and staff.

I want to highlight two significant grants received due to the efforts of Senator Jerry Moran, one of our biggest specialty court supporters. Currently, Kansas has two veterans treatment courts: one in Johnson County and one in Wyandotte County. Grant funding received in 2022 will allow the judicial branch to increase the total number of veterans treatment courts in Kansas to five.

First, Kansas received a \$1 million Byrne Discretionary Grant from the U.S. Department of Justice for a 36-month program that began in August 2022. The

3.15M
in grants
awarded

3
veterans
treatment
courts added



195K veterans
in Kansas*

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

award funded the creation and start of a veterans treatment court in Sedgwick County. Funds were also used to hire a local veterans treatment court coordinator and a mentor coordinator, fund program materials, and provide training for staff. Subgrantees under the award include the Board of Indigent Defense Services, which provide contracted defense counsel to Sedgwick County veterans treatment court participants, and the Sedgwick County Department of Corrections for two community corrections officers who help supervise program participants.

Next, Kansas was awarded \$2 million for veterans treatment courts from the Bureau of Justice Assistance for a 48-month program that began October 2022. The grant includes funding for a statewide specialty court coordinator, local veterans treatment court coordinators in some new and existing treatment courts, a mentor coordinator in Shawnee County, targeted technical assistance funding to

enhance the Wyandotte County treatment court, and money to create and run new veterans treatment courts in Leavenworth and Shawnee counties.

I could not be more grateful for Senator Moran's help securing this funding and for his support. I also thank our chief judges, veterans treatment court judges, prosecutors, court services officers, the VA, and others in these five counties for making the veterans treatment courts a reality for their communities. Finally, I would like to thank retired Chief Justice Lawton Nuss for his continued support for veterans treatment courts. His efforts to promote these courts and ensure justice-involved veterans have access to services is greatly appreciated.

Long-term funding is critical to the continued success of these programs. Recognizing this, Governor Kelly and the 2022 Legislature enacted Senate Substitute for House Bill 2361 to establish the Specialty Court Funding Advisory Committee within the judicial branch. This new advisory committee includes judges, court services officers, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and representatives from the Legislature, Department of Corrections, Department for Aging and Disability Services, and Kansas Sentencing Commission.

This funding advisory committee will work with the Specialty Court Committee to evaluate specific resources available for specialty court operations and treatment for participating individuals. Functionally, the legislation created an account in the state treasury where grants and funds secured by the advisory committee can be deposited before being distributed among the various specialty courts statewide. The advisory committee will report to the judicial administrator its recommendations for resource allocation and legislation to aid developing specialty courts.

Advisory Council on Dispute Resolution

The Advisory Council on Dispute Resolution reviews Kansas' dispute resolution rules and advises the Supreme Court on revisions and updates. Additionally, the council and Office of

Dispute Resolution, which is a part of the Office of Judicial Administration, provide resources to dispute resolution providers. The Office of Dispute Resolution also certifies approved mediators.

Amanda Jacobsen, director of dispute resolution, established a quarterly newsletter for dispute resolution providers this year. She will also hold virtual town halls for dispute resolution providers in the coming months to share information about the application and renewal process.

Additionally, the Advisory Council completed a frequently asked questions document about types of mediation. This document brings context to an important pathway to dispute resolution and explains when mediation is appropriate and its advantages.

Language Access Committee

The Language Access Committee makes recommendations to the Supreme Court to help people with limited English skills access services from Kansas district courts. The committee provides training to court personnel on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, keeping court personnel up to date on their responsibilities to provide meaningful language access in the court system.

The committee also created the first statewide language access plan for the judicial branch. The language access plan serves as the blueprint for complying with state and federal law and providing language assistance to limited English proficient persons who participate in the Kansas court system. The judicial branch is committed to providing meaningful language access to courts for all people, regardless of national origin or level of ability to read, write, speak, or understand English.

In addition to the access plan, the committee developed resources for courts, including signs providing notice of interpreter availability, a directory of translated signage for judicial branch staff, and an addendum for written orders that advises limited English proficient litigants to contact their court if they need assistance understanding a written order.



Administrative Overview

A well-functioning court system is always evolving to improve access to justice, to adapt to changing needs, and to take advantage of new tools to make case processing more efficient and effective.

At the heart of court operations are the judges and employees who show their commitment to providing a modern, well-run judiciary through their initiative, innovation, and award-winning service.



Judge Angela Coble is embraced by members of the Court of Appeals after she is sworn in and joins her fellow judges on the bench.

Appellate court changes

The Court of Appeals welcomed one new judge to its bench in 2022.

Judge Angela Coble joined the Court of Appeals in May 2022 to replace Judge Michael Buser who retired in January. Prior to her appointment, Judge Coble served as counsel to two federal magistrate judges in the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas. Judge Coble also worked as a civil litigator in private practice in Salina.

In June, Judge Anthony Powell announced his retirement after serving nine years on the Kansas Court of Appeals.

Prior to joining the Court of Appeals, Judge Powell served as a district judge for 11 years in Sedgwick County. He also served four terms in the Kansas House of Representatives. Judge Powell heard more than 2,000 cases and wrote 672 opinions during his time on the bench. He was the first judge to serve on the Court of Appeals and continue to live and primarily work in Wichita. Judge Powell said, “My hope was that by proving this could be done



Judge Anthony Powell



Judge Angela Coble

successfully, it would encourage others from outside of northeast Kansas to apply and serve on the Court of Appeals. I think I have succeeded.”

District court changes

In 2022, Kansas district courts continued to experience change on the bench, both through retirements and the first new district judge and district magistrate judge posts certified by the Supreme Court since 2008.

Funding for 23 new judgeships—14 district judge and nine district magistrate judges—was provided



Justice Melissa Standridge takes a question from a student at Independence High School. Justice Standridge visited the school as part of the Supreme Court's travel docket in Parsons in October.



Three Kansas Court of Appeals judges hosted a group of nearly 130 international military officers who visited the Kansas Judicial Center to learn about the U.S. justice system.

Court of Appeals dockets

Court of Appeals panels also schedule dockets in different cities across Kansas. In 2022, Court of Appeals panels traveled to local courthouses in Sterling, Olathe, Kansas City, and Wichita. Court of Appeals panels also hear cases in Topeka and have conducted remote proceedings for some oral arguments since 2016.

Court of Appeals judges host international military officers

Judges Kathryn Gardner, Amy Fellows Cline, and Lesley Ann Isherwood hosted 122 military officers representing 93 nations in July as part of state government day through the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.

Officers involved in the program visit the state capital to learn and understand the workings of state government, including the legislative and judiciary processes. This longstanding tradition dates to 1894, and this year's class marks the 128th year international officers have attended Fort Leavenworth.

After a brief overview of the Kansas justice system given by Judge Gardner, officers had an opportunity to provide oral argument in a mock case before a

panel of three officers who acted as Court of Appeals judges. All were coached on how to play attorney and judge roles.

Employee outreach and recognition

Awards

Almost 92 percent of the Kansas judicial branch budget pays for salaries. This figure illustrates the vital importance of attracting and retaining a qualified workforce. Judicial branch judges and employees are key to delivering access to justice and providing local court services to all Kansans.

This past year, multiple judges received national recognition for their contributions to their community and to the judicial branch. These awards recognize not just the work done in the courtroom and in the legal profession, but also their outreach and commitment to bettering Kansas communities.

Judge Amy Hanley, who sits in Douglas County, was awarded the Honorable Prentice H. Marshall Faculty Award for developing innovative teaching methods. The award is given by the National Institute



for Trial Advocacy, and it recognizes one NITA faculty member who innovates to provide high-quality training to attorneys to advance a fair and impartial justice system. Judge Hanley received the award in part due to developing the NITA Women in Trial Program to empower women lawyers.



Above left: Wendy McCormack, National Institute for Trial Advocacy, presents District Judge Amy Hanley, 7th Judicial District (Douglas County), its Prentice H. Marshall Faculty Award for innovative teaching methods. Above right: Retired Judge Gregory Mize, a judicial fellow at the National Center for State Courts, presents District Judge Thomas Kelly Ryan, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County), the 2022 G. Thomas Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation.

This past year, multiple judges received national recognition for their contributions to their community and to the judicial branch.

Judge Thomas Kelly Ryan, who sits in Johnson County, was awarded the G. Thomas Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation given by the National Center for State Courts Center for Jury Studies. The award was to recognize Judge Ryan for

engaging his local public TV station to help his court identify and address juror concerns early in the COVID-19 pandemic. The award recognizes states, local courts, organizations, and individuals who have made significant improvements or innovations in jury procedures, operations, and practices.

In summer 2020, Judge Ryan, who was then chief judge of the 10th Judicial District, asked Kansas City PBS to help explore what it would take for jurors to feel comfortable reporting for jury duty during the COVID-19 pandemic. That led to “Justice Deferred,” a “Week in Review” special program hosted by Nick Haines.

The 30-minute program begins with 12 potential jurors sharing with Mr. Haines and Judge Ryan their concerns about serving on jury panels during the pandemic. Next, the group is shown health protecting



Mary McQueen, National Center for State Courts, Judge Keven O'Grady, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County), and Stephanie Smith, Kansas judicial administrator, at the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators meeting in July 2022. Judge O'Grady was presented the 2022 Mary C. McQueen Award for "extraordinary contributions to improving the administration of justice at the local, state, or national level for a sustained period of time."

measures used at the courthouse, after which they describe what more could be done to resolve their lingering concerns.

The court used this input to modify its safe jury plan. The 30-minute "Justice Deferred" program also received a 2021 National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Mid-America Regional Chapter EMMY.

As I mentioned in the "Profiles in Justice" section, Judge Keven O'Grady, who sits in Johnson County, was presented the National Center for State Court's 2022 Mary C. McQueen Award for Excellence and Leadership in Justice System Improvement.

Finally, I accepted a pro bono service award on behalf of the judicial branch from the national Legal Services Corporation. The award recognizes the judicial branch's commitment to provide equal access to justice and increased pro bono practice in Kansas. The award presentation underscored efforts by the Kansas judicial branch to provide access for self-represented litigants during the pandemic. Many people are responsible for this recognition, including past and present Access to Justice Committee chairs

Judge Keven O'Grady, Chief Judge Nick St. Peter, who sits in Cowley County, and Judge Bill Ossmann, who sits in Shawnee County. Many other judges and Office of Judicial Administration staff, including Amy Raymond, chief of Trial Court Services, and Sarah Hoskinson, director of access to justice, have been invaluable to our access to justice efforts.

The awards highlighted here represent a fraction of those received by our workforce. Many local, regional, and state organizations also recognize judicial branch judges and employees for their service and dedication to the people of Kansas throughout the year. I am incredibly grateful to our workforce for their efforts to improve our justice system.

Court Current

An important goal for the Office of Judicial Administration executive team is to build strong channels of communication across the branch. With that in mind, judicial administrator Stephanie Smith started Court Current, a weekly email to provide regular updates to judicial branch judges

and employees. It seeks to reduce the total number of communications needed by combining multiple subjects in a single message. Frequent topics include the Kansas eCourt case management system rollout, trainings available to staff, access to justice resources and initiatives, court reporter coverage, and human resources bulletins.

Court Current is an excellent addition to the Office of Judicial Administration communication effort, and we can already see it creating more cohesiveness through shared information and education on branch operations.

Kansas attorney overview

Amendments to Rules Relating to Attorney Registration and Continuing Legal Education

Attorneys are required to pay an annual fee to maintain registration. Continuing legal education hours are also required to remain in good standing. In 2021, the Office of Judicial Administration launched a new attorney registration portal, and the Supreme court made changes to continuing education rules that allow more remote courses.

In 2022, the Supreme Court made minor changes to attorney registration rules to add language to address confidentiality of records. The Supreme Court also amended continuing legal education rules to remove the distinction between an in-house program and other live programs, to allow providers to report live in-person attendance electronically, and to clarify the noncompliance and suspension process.

Amendments to Rules Relating to Attorney Admissions

In 2022, the Supreme Court adopted updated rules governing attorney admissions paving the way for a streamlined process that includes an online application for people seeking admission to the Kansas bar. The updated rules were also restyled to

match other court rules and to better match how an application moves through the admissions process.

Substantive changes in the updated rules include:

- eliminating outdated provisions that precluded admission based on an applicant's failure to achieve a passing score on a prior bar examination, limited the number of times an applicant could take the bar examination, and required termination of a single-employer restricted license when an applicant did not receive a passing score on the bar examination;
- allowing an applicant for admission by examination to take the bar exam while their character and fitness investigation is pending;
- increasing the timeframe for an applicant to apply for admission by Uniform Bar Examination score transfer from 36 months to 60 months;
- making the unauthorized practice of law a consideration during a character and fitness investigation instead of an absolute bar to admission by reciprocity; and
- clarifying the standard of review during a character and fitness hearing.

Swearing-in ceremonies for new attorneys

After passing the bar exam, new attorneys must take an oath before becoming members of the Kansas bar. The Supreme Court presides over admission ceremonies, during which it administers an oath of professionalism to new admittees before their family, friends, and peers.

In April, the Supreme Court conducted an in-person ceremony in its courtroom, where 30 new attorneys took their oath. U.S. District Court Judge Toby Crouse administered the federal oath to admit the new attorneys to federal courts.

The Supreme Court conducted another swearing-in ceremony at the end of September. Judge Crouse and I presided over the ceremony at the Topeka Performing Arts Center at which 114 new attorneys took the oath.



Top: A new attorney shakes hands with Justice Melissa Standridge after she is sworn in.

Bottom: New attorneys are sworn in during a ceremony at the Topeka Performing Arts Center.





Judicial Branch Budget

More than 90 percent of the judicial branch budget is used to pay judge and employee salaries.

Kansans want and expect highly qualified individuals making the life-altering decisions we ask of judges.

To put the judiciary in a better position to attract and retain well-qualified attorneys to the bench, our fiscal year 2024 budget requests a salary increase for judges. It would raise district judge pay to the average adjusted district judge salary of our four neighboring states.

Chief Justice Marla Luckert delivers the 2022 State of the Judiciary address to a joint meeting of the Kansas House of Representatives and Kansas Senate.

2022 budget overview

On behalf of the entire judicial branch, I express deep gratitude for work by the Legislature and Governor Kelly to strengthen the judiciary over the last two sessions and for historic appropriations in fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2023. These appropriations brought court employee pay to fiscal year 2021 market rates and were tremendous strides toward addressing uncompetitive judge pay. They also transformed the judicial system budget by shifting funding for core operations away from unreliable funding sources. Finally, they funded judge and employee positions we have needed for years. These historical enhancements strengthen the judicial branch and I delve into each.

Fee Funding and 2022 House Bill 2541

This past summer, 2022 House Bill 2541 took effect upon its publication in the statute book.

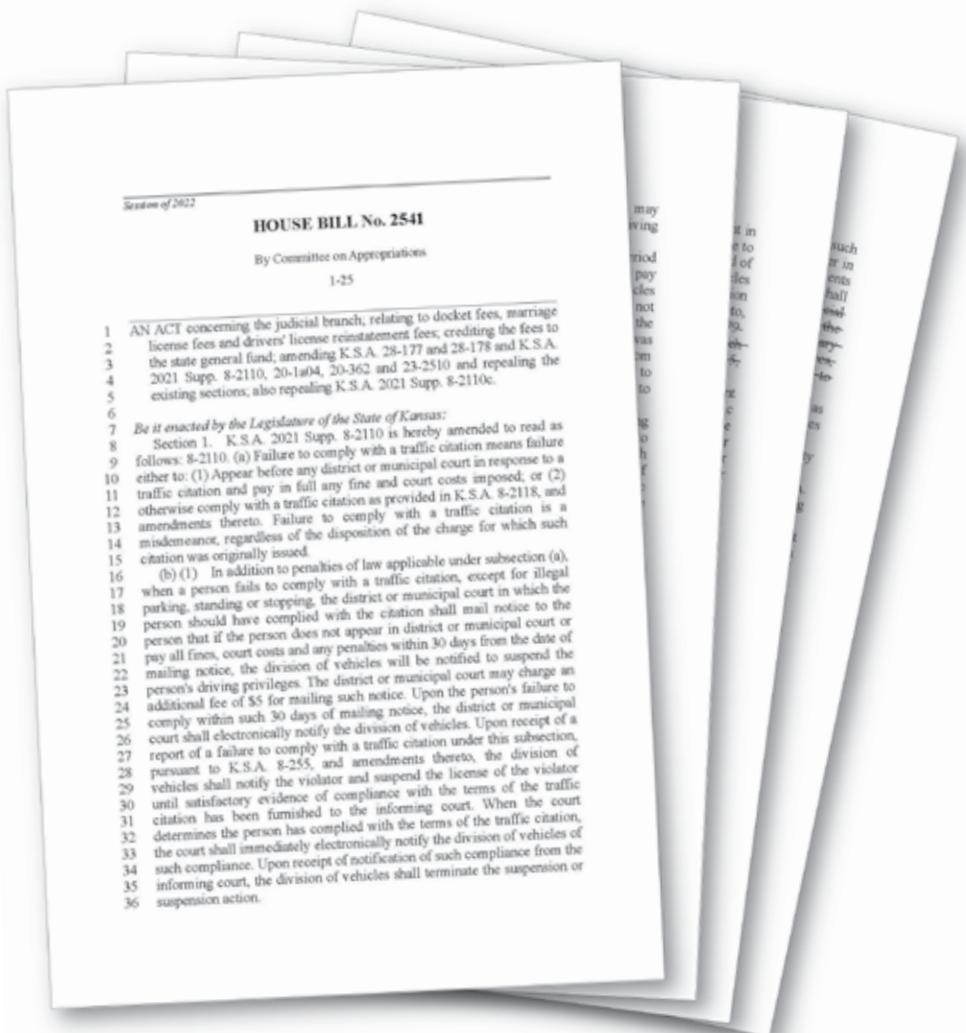
For years, the judicial branch budget depended on unstable court user fees, such as docket fees, a surcharge, and driver's license reinstatement fees. Every year, our finance team would work diligently to try to predict future fee revenue to ensure the judicial branch was adequately funded. Fee fund receipts fluctuate, making them difficult to predict and unreliable as a stable funding source. These fluctuations forced changes to court administration and pushed courts to a breaking point during the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, it was not unusual to keep an employee position open until there was

sufficient funding to support its salary. During the pandemic, lower numbers of case filings and traffic tickets led to a \$7.4 million revenue deficit. To avoid closing courts, the Supreme Court was forced to enact a general statewide hiring freeze to reduce expenditures.

The hiring freeze allowed us to keep courts open, but it caused a vacancy rate that threatened our ability to maintain court operations. Our colleagues in the Statehouse recognized this and responded by funding the gap. Needless risk remained, however,

Below is 2022 House Bill 2541 as it was introduced. The bill shifted deposits of fees that fund core judicial operations to the state general fund. The judicial branch receives a commensurate state general fund appropriation in return, providing needed funding stability.



as court operations continued to depend on an unreliable funding source.

The judicial branch proposed moving core funding away from the unstable source. Again, our colleagues in the Statehouse responded by enacting legislation to remove the risk.

Some Kansas City law firms pay \$170,000 a year to attract first-year associates. These brand-new attorneys start their careers making more than the district judges they appear before.

House Bill 2541 enacted historic change by shifting deposits of fees that fund core judicial operations to the state general fund with the judicial branch receiving a commensurate state general fund appropriation in return. Instead of waiting for month-to-month fluctuations in court user fees, the judicial branch is now steadily funded directly from the state general fund. Only accounts that directly fund core judicial branch operations shifted. They are:

- district court clerk docket fees;
- appellate court clerk docket fees;
- surcharge;
- marriage license fees; and
- driver's license reinstatement fees.

While this change was enacted only recently, for fiscal year 2023, our current fiscal year, the judiciary estimated it would collect about \$28.3 million from the fees listed above.

We are incredibly grateful that House Bill 2541 passed, and we eagerly anticipate experiencing the funding stability it provides the judicial branch.

Compensation and cost-of-living increases

As our economy rapidly changes, adequate judge compensation remains at the forefront of our legislative priorities. The 2021 Legislature increased judicial salaries by 5 percent in both fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2023. And the 2022 Legislature included judges in a 5 percent cost of living increase provided to all state employees. I remain incredibly grateful for these budget enhancements. But work remains. There continues to be a significant gap between the salary the judicial branch offers judges and the salaries well-qualified attorneys can command in the public and private legal market. Two examples illustrate this gap.

First, some Kansas City law firms now pay \$170,000 per year to attract first-year associates. These brand-new attorneys start their careers making more than the district judges they appear before. Yet these associates do not have five years' experience state statute requires to become a judge. The pay gap grows as these attorneys gain experience and advance their careers, making it even harder for them to consider a career in public service as a judge.

Second, the July 1, 2022, National Center for State Courts ranking of judicial salaries for judges placed Kansas 43rd out of 50 states before adjusting for cost of living.

Kansans have given judges profound responsibilities. They call on them to impose death and other criminal sentences that deprive others of life and liberty, to resolve child custody disputes that affect fundamental parental rights, and to conduct other criminal and civil proceedings that result in life-altering judgments. Kansans want and expect highly qualified individuals making the life-altering decisions we ask of judges.

To put the judiciary in a better position to attract and retain well-qualified attorneys to the bench, our fiscal



District Judge Cheryl Rios, 3rd Judicial District (Shawnee County), in her courtroom.

year 2024 budget requests a 15.29 percent salary increase for judges. This increase would raise district judge pay to the average adjusted district judge salary of our four neighboring states.

I am also extremely grateful for the employee pay increases the Governor and the Legislature provided. The increases that bring the rest of our employee positions to fiscal year 2021 market rate, plus the 5 percent cost-of-living increase, greatly improved our ability to attract and retain the staff we need. We heard from employees about the positive effect the increase had on their lives and their families' well-being.

Like last year, prior work to bring employee pay to market rate faces erosion by inflationary pressure. I respectfully ask our Statehouse colleagues to address this because it affects our ability to meet personnel needs. Our fiscal year 2024 budget requests an 8.5 percent increase to employee salaries, an amount equal to the increase in the consumer price index. This increase is to offset inflationary pressures eroding our market rate salaries and help retain our valuable employees.

I remain committed to working with the Legislature and the Governor to further these goals and

appreciate the continued collaboration over the past years to strengthen the judicial branch workforce.

Additional judgeships

A major funding request this past year was to create and fill 14 new district judge positions with staff to support them, and nine new district magistrate judge positions. The request was based on results of a weighted workload study for district court judges conducted by the National Center for State Courts. After reviewing the data and receiving input from our chief judges on their most critical needs, our request followed. By meeting this request and adding the first new judge positions since 2008, the Legislature made great strides toward relieving strained district court capacity.

The Legislature also approved funding to convert one district magistrate position to a district judge position in the 12th Judicial District, 17th Judicial District, and 24th Judicial District. Each of these multi-county judicial districts needed this change because one district judge was no longer adequate to meet each district's needs.



Fiscal Year 2022 Caseload

321,678*

cases filed in district courts
in fiscal year 2022.

Third floor of the Wyandotte County Courthouse.

*These preliminary numbers could change slightly once filing statistics for fiscal year 2022 are finalized. Courts operate on one of three case management systems until the transition to the Kansas eCourt case management system is complete. When the transition is complete, timely gathering and reporting annual case management statistical data will resume.



The pandemic brought rapid change to Kansas courts. A few changes, like social distancing, dissipated as the pandemic waned. Other changes, such as remote hearings, judges added to their docket management toolbox to use when appropriate to expeditiously resolve cases or as necessary for the health of court users.

Court users note the value of remote hearings, particularly for matters like scheduling dockets and first appearances. I am enormously proud of the Office of Judicial Administration and our district

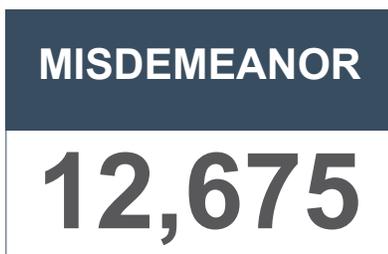
courts for rapidly adapting to the biggest change to judicial proceedings in our lifetime. Through innovation, adaptation, and resilience, we kept our courts open and available for Kansans. We also took lessons from the pandemic to improve court technology infrastructure and capabilities.

Below are the filing totals for fiscal year 2022 in a few common categories of cases.

Civil
 Criminal
 Probate



***from abuse, stalking, sexual assault, or human trafficking*





In Closing

I thank you again for all your work and dedication to strengthen the Kansas judicial system.

When the court system consists of a robust and strong workforce, creative programs and initiatives can grow. These programs and initiatives provide better court services to all Kansans, and we will continue to strive to improve the judicial system for all.

I look forward to working with you to continue our shared goals.

Marla Zuckert

