

2023-2024

Tennessee Judiciary

ANNUAL REPORT



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Opening Remarks



Chief Justice Holly Kirby

We are pleased to bring you this annual report on the operations of our court system. Tennessee has the finest assemblage of judges and staff—at all levels—of any court system in the nation. Under our State’s Constitution, the people consent to be governed, and the court system must earn their continuing consent and confidence. The dedicated public servants who comprise Tennessee’s court system work hard to do that every day.

We’re currently poised to harness technology to leverage the excellent work of the judges, clerks, and staff in the court system to better serve our citizens. We are also grateful to the elected leaders who listened with open hearts and minds and took action following the judiciary’s 2023 request for additional funding for indigent representation. That very recent rate increase is reflected in this report and we look forward to sharing more details on how this additional funding will allow the judicial branch to take essential steps forward.

Thank you for the honor of allowing us to work every day to bring justice to the people of our great State.



Director
Michelle J. Long, Esq.

The Administrative Office of the Courts is focused on ushering the judiciary into a new modern era. Recently, we have made significant investments in technology, including traditional network and bandwidth expansions as well as building and upgrading new data bases. In addition, our technological advances also are more forward facing, including a new modern website, migration to Microsoft Outlook, and expanded live streaming and video production of court cases and special events.

The AOC took big steps forward in two projects. First, we began to lay the groundwork for the single largest technological investment in the court system in the State’s history. We partnered with the National Center for State Courts and Gartner Consulting to envision and develop a comprehensive, unified technology solution for the entire court system. In partnership with the Department of Finance & Administration’s Strategic Technology Solutions, we will continue this work in the years to come.

By focusing on increasing operational efficiencies across the judiciary and at the AOC, we continue to build trust and confidence in Tennessee’s court system. Thank you for your support of the judicial branch, which I am proud to serve.

Overview of the Tennessee Judicial System

The judicial branch, one of the three basic divisions of state government, serves as a check on the powers of both the legislative and executive branches. Through the power of judicial review, the courts rule on the constitutionality of legislation passed by the General Assembly and consider the legality of administrative policies and regulations.

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the state. The five justices are nominated by the Governor's Council for Judicial Appointments, appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the General Assembly, and retained by voters on a "yes-no" ballot for 8-year terms. The majority of this court's workload consists of cases appealed from lower state courts. Appeals are granted or denied at the discretion of the Supreme Court, except in capital punishment cases where direct appeals are automatic. The five justices also interpret the laws and Constitutions of Tennessee and the United States. The court may assume jurisdiction over undecided cases in the Court of Appeals or Court of Criminal Appeals when there is special need for a speedy decision.

The intermediate appellate courts — the Court of Appeals and Court of Criminal Appeals — hear civil and criminal cases appealed from the trial courts. Each of the intermediate appellate courts has 12 members who sit in panels of three to hear cases. All three appellate courts normally sit in Knoxville, Nashville and Jackson. Members of the Court of Appeals and Court of Criminal Appeals are appointed and elected under the same system as the Tennessee Supreme Court.



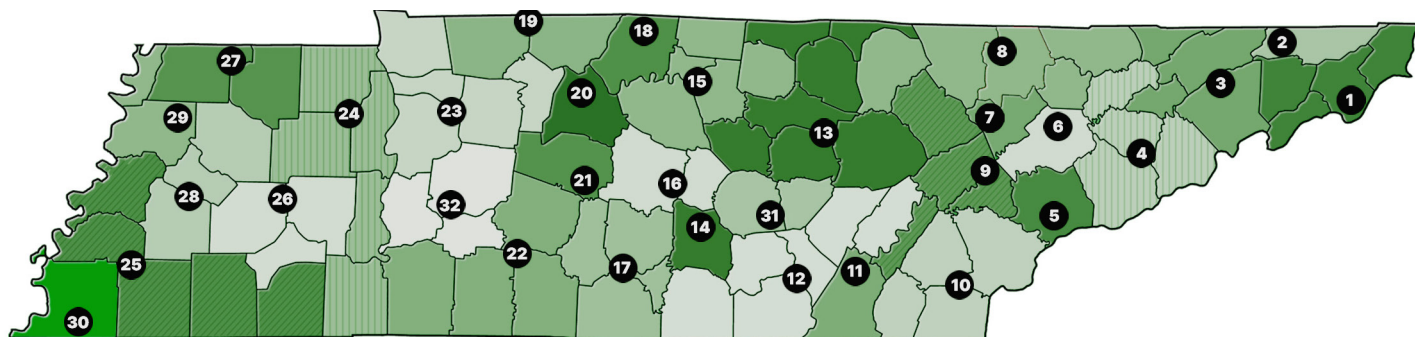
The state's trial courts include Chancery, Criminal, Circuit and Probate Courts. Judges in these courts are chosen by popular election within their judicial districts. They are elected to 8-year terms. When a mid-term vacancy opens, the Trial Court Vacancy Commission recommends three applicants to the governor, who makes an appointment. Under the law, the governor can reject all three recommended applicants for trial judge positions and ask the Trial Court Vacancy Commission to begin the process again.

Courts of limited jurisdiction make up the fourth judicial level in Tennessee. These locally funded courts are General Sessions, Juvenile and Municipal Courts.

Although not a part of the court system, the offices of the attorney general, district attorneys general and district public defenders are associated with the judicial branch of state government. The attorney general, who is appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court, represents the interests of the state in civil litigation and criminal appeals. The 32 district attorneys serve as prosecuting counsel in criminal trials. Public defenders and court-appointed private attorneys represent indigent defendants, primarily in criminal cases.

Overview of the Tennessee Judicial System

Tennessee Judicial District Map



Presiding Judges

Each judicial district elects one judge to serve as presiding judge for the district. In this context, the presiding judge ensures orderly and efficient administration and distribution of the workload in a district.

1	Stacy L. Street	17	James "J.B." Cox
2	William Rogers	18	Louis W. Oliver, III
3	John F. Dugger, Jr.	19	Robert T. Bateman
4	O. Duane Slone	20	Angelita Blackshear Dalton
5	Tammy M. Harrington	21	Joseph A. Woodruff
6	Christopher Heagerty	22	M. Caleb Bayless
7	Ryan M. Spitzer	23	Larry J. Wallace
8	Elizabeth C. Asbury	24	Vicki H. Hoover
9	Tom McFarland	25	Kasey Culbreath
10	Michael Jenne	26	Steven Maroney
11	Michael Dumitru	27	Jeffrey H. Parham
12	Bradley Sherman	28	Michael Mansfield
13	Wesley Bray	29	Tony A. Childress
14	Robert Carter	30	Carolyn Wade Blackett
15	Michael Collins	31	Larry Bart Stanley, Jr.
16	Jo Atwood	32	Michael E. Spitzer

Advancing Technology

Court System Information Technology

The leadership of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the support of the Executive and Legislative branches of state government have combined to invest in the development of a Statewide Court System Technology Solution designed to create a unified court information and court operations system supporting the needs of judges and court clerks in a multi-court, multi-jurisdictional judiciary. The State is partnering with Gartner Consulting, a technology consulting firm, to guide the design and implementation of a solution that meets electronic court standards for the following court operations components.



Justice Sarah Campbell

Microsoft 365 Migration

In 2024, the AOC began transitioning the entire court system from Micro Focus GroupWise email to Microsoft Outlook email. The transition is providing a superior email solution that is more reliable, collaborative, streamlined, and secure as well as a suite of additional Microsoft resources.



2,000 users migrated

Statewide Court Technology Solution

The leadership of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the support of the Executive and Legislative branches of state government have combined to invest in the development of a Statewide Court System Technology Solution designed to create a unified court information and court operations system supporting the needs of judges and court clerks in a multi-court, multi-jurisdictional judiciary. The State is partnering with Gartner Consulting, a technology consulting firm, to guide the design and implementation of a solution that meets electronic court standards for the following court operations components.



eFile
Solution



Case
Management



Document
Storage



Financial
Management



Data
Repository



Data
Reporting

Improving Juvenile data with QUEST

The Administrative Office of the Courts launched QUEST, a juvenile case management system, in response to 2021 legislation calling for improvements to data collection in juvenile courts. QUEST has increased the use of consistent definitions and produced reliable data reports. **By August 2024, 60 of the 98 juvenile courts will be live on QUEST.** Please see [Juvenile & Family Courts](#) for recent data on juvenile felony cases.

Tennessee Supreme Court

The Tennessee Supreme Court is the state's court of last resort. The justices may accept appeals of civil and criminal cases from lower state courts. They also interpret the laws and constitutions of Tennessee and the United States.



(L-R) Justice Sarah Campbell, Justice Jeffrey S. Bivins, Chief Justice Holly Kirby, Justice Roger A. Page, Justice Dwight E. Tarwater



Appeals Filed

707



Appeals Finalized

678



Opinions

24



Orders

684



Clearance Rate

95.9%

FY 2023-2024



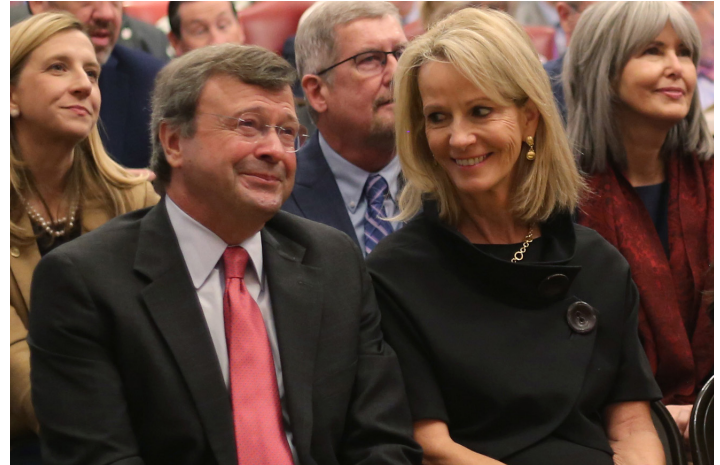
Tennessee Supreme Court Justices meet with students at UofM

Tennessee Supreme Court



Justice Holly Kirby Elected Chief Justice

Justice Holly Kirby was elected chief justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court in September 2023. Chief Justice Kirby first joined the state's high court in 2014. Previously she served on the Tennessee Court of Appeals and was the first woman to sit on the intermediate appellate court.



Justice Dwight Tarwater Joins the Court

Justice Dwight E. Tarwater was nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the General Assembly in 2023. Justice Tarwater was born and raised in Knoxville. He earned both his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.



Justice Sharon G. Lee retires

Justice Sharon G. Lee retired from the Court on August 31, 2023. She was first appointed in 2008 and served as Chief Justice from 2014 to 2016.

Justice Roger Page honored by University of Memphis

The University of Memphis honored Justice Roger A. Page as an Outstanding Law Alumni for his service to the state's highest court. Page received his JD from the University of Memphis Law School in 1984. He retires in August after serving more than eight years on the Court. He served as Chief Justice from September 2021 to August 2023.

Chief Justice Kirby honored with prestigious Drowota III Award

Chief Justice Holly Kirby was honored with the Tennessee Bar Association's Justice Frank F. Drowota III Award for her efforts spearheading an increase in the hourly rate of reimbursement for attorneys who accept appointed cases, which often involved indigent families and children, as well as sensitive issues such as allegations of dependency, abuse, and neglect.

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals hears a broad range of non-criminal matters, from automobile accidents to zoning issues. The Court considers each case carefully and strives to provide a correct decision in a timely manner.



Back Row (L-R): Judge Kristi M. Davis, Judge Kenny Armstrong, Judge W. Neal McBrayer, Judge Thomas R. Frierson, II, Judge Arnold B. Goldin, Judge Carma Dennis McGee, Judge Jeffrey Usman. **Front Row (L-R):** Judge J. Steven Stafford, Judge Frank G. Clement, Jr., Judge D. Michael Swiney, Judge Andy D. Bennett, Judge John Westley McClarty



Appeals Filed

844



Appeals Finalized

894



Clearance Rate

105.9%

FY 2023-2024



Judge Usman Investiture

Court of Criminal Appeals

The Court of Criminal Appeals hears trial court appeals in felony and misdemeanor cases, as well as post-conviction matters.



Back Row (L-R): Judge Kyle A. Hixson, Judge John W. Campbell, Judge J. Ross Dyer, Judge Timothy L. Easter, Judge Jill Bartee Ayers, Judge Tom Greenholtz, Judge Matthew Wilson. Front Row (L-R): Judge Robery L. Holloway, Jr., Judge James Curwood Witt, Jr., Judge Camille R. McMullen, Judge Robert W. Wedemeyer, Judge Robert H. Montgomery, Jr.



739

Appeals Filed



757

Appeals Closed



102.4%

Clearance Rate

FY 2023-2024

The Court of Criminal Appeals unanimously elected Judge Camille R. McMullen as its Presiding Judge. She succeeds Judge Curwood Witt of Knoxville. Judge McMullen was appointed by former Governor Phil Bredesen in 2008. She is the first woman and the first African-American to lead the 12-member appellate court.

“The role of this court in the criminal justice system is incredibly important. The Tennessee Supreme Court only accepts about 3 percent of cases that are appealed, therefore, as a practical matter, we are the court of last resort for 97 percent of criminal cases across the state. The issues we decide are serious and have a direct impact on so many lives.”

- Judge McMullen



Judge Camille R. McMullen

State Trial Courts



Judge Mary L. Wagner appointed to Tennessee Supreme Court

In 2024, Judge Mary Wagner, a circuit court judge for the 30th judicial district, which includes Shelby county, was appointed by Governor Bill Lee to the Tennessee Supreme Court. She was confirmed by the General Assembly and will join the Court August 31, 2024 following the retirement of Justice Roger A. Page.

“Mary is a highly qualified judge who will bring significant experience to the Tennessee Supreme Court. Her understanding and respect for the rule of law and commitment to the conservative principles of judicial restraint make her well-suited for the state’s highest court, and I am proud to appoint her to this position”

- Governor Bill Lee

First adoption in new Sumner County Judicial Complex

Judge Joe Thompson, 18th Judicial District, presides over the first adoption in the new Sumner County Judicial Complex which opened in 2024.



“The new courthouse is the best of all worlds - a state of the art facility housed inside traditional architecture with room for growth for decades to come. In eighty years, this little girl will be able to tell her great grandchildren that she was the first child adopted in the Sumner County Courthouse.”

- Judge Joe Thompson



Chancellor JoeDae L. Jenkins | PHOTO: CHRIS DAY/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL | SOURCE: PEOPLE.COM

Tennessee Judge Halts Graceland sale

Shelby County Chancellor JoeDae Jenkins issued a temporary injunction against the proposed auction of the former home of Elvis Presley in May 2024

“The court will enjoin the sale as requested because, one, the real estate is considered unique under Tennessee law. And in being unique, the loss of the real estate would be considered irreparable harm”

-Judge Jenkins

State Trial Courts

Judge James Ross Elected President of the Tennessee General Sessions Judges Conference



Judge James Y. Ross, Wayne County General Sessions & Juvenile Court Judge, was elected president of the Tennessee General Sessions Judges Conference (TGSJC). Judge Ross graduated from Samford University School of Law in 1987. He was elected to the General Sessions bench in Wayne County in 1998 while continuing to serve as city judge for the Clifton City Clerk and the city of Collinwood.

Judge Chuck Cerny Receives Leon Ruben Award

Knox County General Sessions Judge Chuck Cerny received the Leon Ruben Award for Excellence at the Tennessee General Sessions Judges Conference. Judge Cerny presides over the misdemeanor and felony drug recovery courts in Knox County and the Veterans treatment court. He is also starting a mental health court.

Court Statistics

Criminal Court Case Studies		Chancery Court Case Statistics	
Clearance Rate July 2022 - June 2023	Total	Clearance Rate July 2022 - June 2023	Total
Filings	153,060	Filings	56,536
Dispositions	158,064	Dispositions	55,721
Clearance Rate	103%	Clearance Rate	98%

Circuit Court Case Statistics	
Clearance Rate July 2022 - June 2023	Total
Filings	43,783
Dispositions	44,366
Clearance Rate	101%

FY 2023

General Sessions Courts

The jurisdiction of the General Sessions Courts varies from county to county based on state laws and private acts. Every county in Tennessee is served by this court of limited jurisdiction which hears both civil and criminal cases.

Case filings & dispositions in General Sessions Court

The General Sessions Data Repository (GSDR) provides policymakers and judges with detailed information.

- Fees assessed and receipted
- Cases related to certain drug offenses
- Cases finalized during a certain time period grouped by serving agency
- Time between filing and disposition
- Indigent fees assessed or waived per judge
- Cases appointed a private attorney/public defender

*Data is collected from 86/95 counties

*Data collection began in July 2017

FY 2023



Left to right: General Sessions Conference President Deborah Henderson (Shelby) and incoming President James Ross (Wayne). Judges Casey Stokes (Meigs), Ryan Moore (Warren) and Mike Hinson (Lewis); Judges Vicki Snyder (Henry) and Andy Brigham (Stewart).

Juvenile & Family Courts

A juvenile is any individual under eighteen 18 who has not been previously transferred to adult court. Juvenile courts deal with delinquency, status offenses and issues concerning dependency and neglect, child abuse, child support, custody issues, and the need for medical and/or mental health treatment for children.

Juvenile felony charges

Percentage change from 22-23 to 23-24

Possession of unlawful drug paraphernalia

↓ 64% decrease

Unlawful carrying/possession of a weapon

↓ 46% decrease

Aggravated robbery

↓ 34% decrease

Possession of a weapon on school property

↓ 28% decrease

Juvenile courts data is collected and tracked through Quest, a case management system.

Family Preservation Initiative- A partnership with the AOC and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The Family Preservation Initiative works to prevent juvenile court involvement up front. The program has seen 0% recidivism

Safe Baby Courts- Tennessee is leading the nation in the focus on prevention work within Safe Baby Courts. Tennessee has seen tremendous success reunifying families and keeping children out of the foster care system. Since its inception, most SBC cases are noncustodial cases which achieve permanency faster than foster care (custodial) cases.



Maury county Safe Baby Court



Grundy County Safe Baby Court

Commitment to Justice

Indigent Representation

In 2024 the General Assembly made an essential and significant step forward in addressing adequate compensation of appointed counsel.

The \$8.6 million in additional funding for indigent representation followed a critical funding request from the Administrative Office of the Courts, with the support of the Tennessee Supreme Court, state judges, general sessions judges and juvenile judges.

The additional funding will provide a \$10 increase in the hourly rate of reimbursement for attorneys who accept appointments, along with a proportionate increase in the current cap on the total amount a court-appointed attorney may recoup per case, the first across-the-board rate increase since 1997.

The AOC looks forward to sharing how this additional funding will allow the Judicial Branch to take essential steps forward.



Chief Justice
Holly Kirby

"I'm grateful for our judges who spoke forcefully about their struggle to find lawyers willing to take indigent cases- nearly half of which are in juvenile court and involve families and children in neglect or abuse cases. I'm grateful for the lawyers who explained how an extremely low rate of reimbursement impacted their ability to represent indigent parties. And I'm grateful for the elected leaders who listened with open hearts and minds and took action. We have more work to do, but this additional funding will allow the Court to respond to the impending crisis in the administration of justice in Tennessee."

- Chief Justice Holly Kirby

AOC Indigent Representation

In 2023, the AOC created the Indigent Services Team to improve support and efficiency in the administration of indigent representation claims.

As a result, turnaround time for processing claims has dropped from an average of approximately 8-9 weeks to 30 days.

Indigent Services Team

Led by attorney Joe Byrd, the Indigent Services Team produces a monthly newsletter to keep attorneys and other users up to date on changes and upgrades to the software system used for claims and tips for filing claiming claims. The newsletter corresponds with a monthly podcast, Appointed Counsel.



Commitment to Justice

New Judgeships

Tennessee's 32 judicial districts span from single county districts in urban areas of the state to seven-county districts in rural areas. In 2023, the AOC New Judge Bill was signed adding three new judge positions: a criminal court judge in the 13th, a circuit court judge in the 19th, and a circuit court judge in the 22nd.

"We appreciate Governor Lee and our elected officials recognizing the need to alleviate caseloads in overburdened districts- ensuring the justice system remains accessible to all."

Chief Justice Holly Kirby



L to R: Michelle Consiglio-Young, AOC Intergovernmental Affairs Division Director; Judge Joel Wallace, 19th Judicial District Circuit Court Judge; Judge Wallace's son; State Senator Kerry Roberts; Judge Valerie Smith, TJC President and 30th Judicial District Circuit Court Judge; Judge Katy Olita, 19th Judicial District Circuit Court Judge; Governor Bill Lee; Tennessee Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Page; AOC Director Michelle J. Long; Judge Christopher Stockwell, 22nd Judicial District Circuit Court Judge; Judge William Ridley, 13th Judicial District Circuit Court Judge; and Tennessee Supreme Court Chief Justice Holly Kirby.

New judges appointed in 2022-2023:

Judge Stanley Kweller, 20th Judicial District Circuit Court
Chancellor Jamie Brooks, 7th Judicial District
Judge Julie Heffington, 22nd Judicial District Circuit Court
Ashleigh Travis, 19th Judicial District Circuit Court
Shawn Fry, 13th Judicial District Criminal Court
Terry Fann, 16th Judicial District Circuit Court
Erin Nations, 21st Judicial District Circuit Court

New judges appointed in 2023-2024:

Jennifer Nichols, 18th Judicial District Circuit Court
Jessica Parrish, 22nd Judicial District Circuit Court
Jim Newsom, 30th Judicial District Chancery Court



Director
Michelle J. Long, Esq.

"As the state's population grows, so does the need for new judicial positions. We appreciate the work of the General Assembly and Governor Bill Lee for addressing access to justice in Tennessee with the creation of three new judgeships in 2023."

Director Michelle Long

Commitment to Justice

Special Three-Judge Panels

In 2021, the Governor signed an act to create special three-judge panels for cases that meet specific criteria and the Tennessee Supreme Court amended the Rules of the Supreme Court of Tennessee to add new Rule 54, Interim Rule for Special Three-Judge Panels, effective July 1, 2021.

When a three-judge panel is appointed under the law, the Supreme Court selects two trial court judges to sit with the judge to whom the case was originally assigned. There is one judge from each of Tennessee's three grand divisions and the Supreme Court designates a chief judge for the case. On the panel, a majority vote rules. The venue for the case is the county where the plaintiff resides and is Sumner County if the plaintiff is not a Tennessee resident.



29

Panels Appointed
Throughout the State



16

Cases Resolved



13

Cases Pending

Data from 2021 to July 2024

Cases resolved include:

[Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County v. Bill Lee, et al.](#)

Plaintiff filed suit against State Defendants over the General Assembly's 2023 amendment to the Metropolitan Airport Authority Act to transfer appointment powers from the local government to state officials for qualifying metropolitan airport authorities from the local government of the county in which those authorities reside. Plaintiff asserts the amendment violates the Home Rule Amendment and the Equal Protection Guarantee of the Tennessee Constitution.

[Hillside Winery, Inc. v. Commissioner of Revenue](#)

Plaintiff filed suit against the Commissioner of the Department of Revenue, challenging the wine gallonage tax to out-of-state sales as unconstitutional under the Dormant Commerce Clause.

[Islamic Center of Nashville v. State of Tennessee, et al](#)

Plaintiff filed suit against State Defendants, asserting the current Religious Tax Exemption Provision violates a number of federal Constitutional provisions, as well as the Tennessee Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Commitment to Accountability

Accountability and transparency are critical to judicial governance and to the preservation and strengthening of an independent judiciary. The Administrative Office of the Courts is committed to initiatives that allow for increased accountability and public understanding of the judicial system.

Open Courts

The AOC provides judicial staff with media support and guidance, facilitating the state's commitment to open courts and ensuring the fair and impartial administration of justice in pending cases.

Public Case History

The [Public Case History](#) is an online tool that enables public access to cases in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals and Court of Criminal Appeals. In addition to providing information about the status and procedural history of an appeal, access to motions, orders, judgments and opinions filed in the appellate courts after August 26, 2013 are all accessible through this tool. These documents are in PDF format and linked to the particular event in the Public Case History.



Media coverage of David Swift v. Tennessee in Weakley Co

Education

The AOC manages educational conferences for state judges, general sessions judges, juvenile judges, municipal judges, court clerks, and staff attorneys and law clerks.

12 + conferences annually | 1200 + attendees

The AOC works with each conference to develop quality education programs that help attendees navigate changing laws and develop effective practices.





Commitment to Accountability

Live Streaming

Oral arguments in the state appellate courts have been live streamed on YouTube since April of 2020.
From FY 2022-2023 viewership increased 71%

Supreme Court	Live streams	Views
2022-2023	11	27,535
2023-2024	22	21,260

Court of Appeals	Live streams	Views
2022-2023	261	63,921
2023-2024	556	142,997

Court of Criminal Appeals	Live streams	Views
2022-2023	25	14,747
2023-2024	185	33,357

In 2024, Tennessee’s TN Courts YoutTube channel ranked in the **Top 5** most viewed judicial channels in the U.S. , according to YouTube analytics.

1.

California - 7,003
2.

Michigan - 6,009
3.

Indiana - 5,130
4.

Tennessee - 4,644
5.

Texas - 4,490

Commitment to Accountability

Podcasts



Tennessee Court Talk- (buzzsprout.com)

Tennessee Court Talk is an educational podcast from the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, bringing together the very best law experts to discuss topics affecting judges, attorneys, law students, and the people of Tennessee.

134% increase in downloads for Tennessee Court Talk from FY 2022-2023

2022-2023

2,387

2023-2024

5,587



Appointed Counsel

An education podcast hosted by Indigent Services Team lead attorney Joe Byrd. Appointed Counsel is intended for attorneys and other users to stay up to speed on tips for managing indigent services claims.

Podcasts that demonstrate accountability include:

[Technology in the Courts](#): Technology is changing at a rapid pace, and judicial systems in Tennessee and around the U.S. are finding innovative ways to keep up, from positive uses of AI, to civic education, to improved access to justice, data access, and more. Hosted by Justice Sarah Campbell.

[Public Trust and Confidence in the Courts](#) trust and confidence in the courts is becoming a major concern in the media and among the public, as surveys conducted by the National Center for State Courts have shown declines in public trust over the last decade.

[Recovery Courts](#) offer the opportunity for some individuals to overcome adversity through rehabilitative alternatives to prison. In this episode, a panel of state judges look at the options and outcomes in Tennessee.



Judge J. Steven Stafford, Court of Appeals
Episode 32, *Humanizing The Bench with Judge Steven Stafford*

Commitment to Access

The Supreme Court established an Access to Justice initiative in 2009. The AOC partners with the private bar to provide Tennesseans with a robust pro bono legal services through the Access to Justice Initiative (AJI). With support of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the ATJ staff, each year private practice attorneys provide thousands of hours of free, civil legal advice and counsel to neighbors in need.

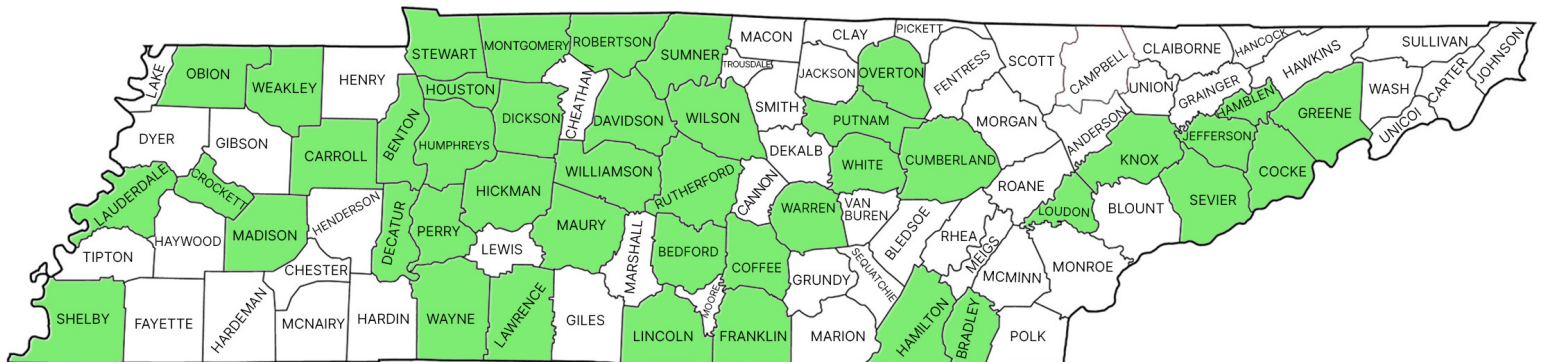
Justice Bus

The Justice Bus launched in June of 2022. It is a mobile law office that brings technology to rural and underserved communities. The Justice Bus is a passenger van outfitted with all the technology necessary to provide on-the-spot access to legal help, meeting Tennesseans where they are around the state. Highlighted below in green are counties visited by the Justice Bus to date.



Pro bono attorney Kyle Stack and Justice Bus coordinator Alyvia Bush in McMinnville, TN.

98 Justice Bus Engagements: 2023 and 2024



Pro Bono Activities

The AOC promotes access to the legal system, especially for those with limited resources through the Access, Innovation, & Community Engagement (AICE) team.

The Access, innovation & Community Engagement Team (AICE) partners with legal aid organizations lawyers, mediators, law students, and others to provide court mediation, court interpreters, and other essential services.



\$125.9 million in legal services



1,596 hours of training for lawyers and Faith Members

Commitment to Access

Electronic Filing

In Tennessee, each court decides when to adopt an electronic filing (e-filing) system. The Tennessee Supreme Court Trial Court E-Filing Oversight Committee approves applications to ensure consistency and high standards.

- Appellate and trial court e-filing systems are accessed through an e-filing portal at TnCourts.gov.
- 75% of all appellate briefs are e-filed in the Tennessee Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals and the Court of Criminal Appeals.

The following courts offer e-filing:

- Bledsoe Chancery
- Coffee Chancery
- Davidson Chancery
- Davidson Circuit/General Sessions
- Davidson Criminal / General Sessions
- Davidson Juvenile
- Hamblen Chancery
- Hamilton Juvenile
- Hancock Chancery
- Rutherford Chancery
- Rutherford Circuit
- Sequatchie Chancery
- Sumner Chancery
- Sumner Circuit
- Shelby Chancery
- Shelby Circuit
- Williamson Chancery
- Williamson Circuit

These courts have Applied:

- Lawrence Circuit
- Lawrence General Sessions
- Lawrence Juvenile
- Lincoln Circuit
- Marshall Chancery
- Marshall Circuit
- Moore Circuit
- Montgomery Chancery
- Shelby Juvenile
- Shelby Probate
- Wayne Chancery

Approved, not Implemented:

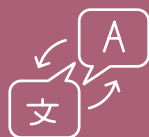
- Bedford Chancery
- Bedford Circuit
- Blount Circuit Court
- Blount General Sessions
- Coffee Circuit/GS and JV
- Crockett Chancery
- Franklin Circuit
- Frankline General Sessions
- Franklin Juvenile
- Gibson-Humboldt Chancery
- Gibson-Trenton Chancery
- Gibson-Trenton Circuit
- Greene Chancery
- Hamilton Chancery
- Haywood Chancery
- Jefferson Circuit
- Jefferson General Sessions/Juv
- Lincoln Chancery
- Marion Chancery
- Maury Chancery
- Moore Chancery
- Montgomery Circuit
- Rhea Chancery
- Robertson Chancery
- Robertson Circuit

Commitment to Access

Court Interpreters

The Tennessee Supreme Court created the court interpreter program to help mitigate the challenges that non-English speakers face in court. Consequently, all non-English speakers who appear before a Tennessee court have the right to an interpreter so that they can understand and participate in courtroom proceedings and have meaningful access to the judicial system.

More than 80 interpreters attended the Ethics and Skills Building Workshops in 2023-2024, the first step in the credentialing program.



Nearly 50 certified and registered interpreters



32 languages

FY 2023



2023 languages include:

Spanish, Mandarin, Swahili, Arabic, Kurdish, Portuguese, Russian, and Yoruba.



Commitment to Tennessee

SCALES

Through the Supreme Court Advancing Legal Education for Students (SCALES), high school students learn about the judicial branch in their local communities. Oral Arguments are typically held at Tennessee Tech, East Tennessee State University & University of Tennessee Martin.



Commitment to Tennessee

Problem Solving Courts / Recovery Courts

Problem solving courts use a specialized model in which judiciary, prosecution, defense bar, probation, law enforcement, mental health and treatment communities work together to help selected offenders into long-term recovery.



Veterans Courts

Hybrid drug and mental health courts serve veterans struggling with addiction, mental illness and other disorders.



Mental Health Courts

Divert select defendants into judicially-supervised, community-based treatment.



DUI Courts

A docket within a juvenile court handled by a designated judge. The youth referred to this docket struggle with alcohol and other drugs.



Juvenile and Family Courts

A juvenile drug court is a docket within a juvenile court, to which selected delinquency cases and in some instances status offenders, are referred for handling by a designated judge. The youth referred to this docket are identified as having problems with alcohol and/or other drugs.



Adult Recovery Courts

92 recovery courts state-wide reducing recidivism and substance abuse among drug-involved adult offenders in the community



92 Recovery courts state-wide



“Our partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts and judges all across Tennessee is truly changing lives, restoring families, and improving communities every day. We are so grateful for the commitment and passion of our Recovery Court partners because we know this work is building resiliency, making space for recovery, and inspiring independence all across our great state.”

Commissioner Marie Williams, LCSW

Commitment to Tennessee

Spotlight: Anderson County Recovery Court

The Anderson County Recovery Court is a drug court started in 2007 by then Seventh District Circuit Judge Donald R. Elledge. The Recovery Court is now overseen by Judge Ryan Spitzer.



Judge Ryan Spitzer



L to R: Judge Ryan Spitzer,
Guy Love



L to R - Judge Spitzer,
Michael Phillips, Director
Winnie Gadd, and Retired
Judge Donald R. Elledge

“It’s been a personal commitment of mine to continue the important, life-saving work of the Anderson County Recovery Court. It wouldn’t be possible without the help of our mayor, county commission, business leaders, and others. We especially appreciate the funding assistance from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) when that became a critical issue.

We always want to be following best practices and adjusting where necessary. That’s why we recently adopted something called Recovery Court 2.0 which includes expanding our array of support measures so that participants in recovery court will be able to stay the course, graduate, and go on to live healthy, productive lives.

Having come from a prosecutor background and having prosecuted some of the people in my recovery court, to be able to see them turn their lives around, find new and gainful employment, and reconnect with their families, is especially moving. One woman had tears in her eyes, watching as her son- a man I had once prosecuted- graduated from our recovery court. He was now back in her life and doing well. It was incredible.”

- Judge Ryan Spitzer

Commitment to Tennessee

Online Dispute Resolution

The Online Dispute Resolution Pilot Program (ODR) provides a promising remedy to medical debt in our state. Tennessee has the 10th highest medical debt rate in the country (Sycamore Institute). The majority of medical debtors default due to a failure to appear in court. Online debt resolution provides a remedy for patients and families who want to address their debt.

The Administrative Office of the Courts launched the ODR Pilot Program in coordination with the Hamilton County General Sessions Court and Erlanger Health, a private, non-profit hospital providing care to all individuals, regardless of ability to pay.

The program utilizes technology, legal assistance, mediation and judicial resources to provide a model for pre-court filing resolution services. These services minimize burdens on the courts and enhance access to justice for Tennesseans. The program can serve as a desirable tool for claim resolution across the state in many areas of legal claims in addition to medical debt.

Hamilton County General Sessions Judge Alexander McVeagh serves as the Judicial Sponsor of the Pilot.

“Tennessee General Sessions Courts see subsequent garnishments, evictions, credit card debt suits, credit bureau disputes and even criminal cases flowing from underlying medical and other consumer debt –all negatively affecting creditors, debtors, and a clogged court system. We hope that other courts and medical providers will see the exciting data contained in this report and help us to expand this program to other jurisdictions for further study and implement this innovative pilot program.”

- Judge Alexander McVeagh



Judge Alexander McVeagh

Phase 2 pilot program results (January 2, 2022- December 31, 2023)



71% of matters resolved



\$408,663- debt resolved



\$11,472- charity care provided

The Administrative Office of the Courts

Serving as a trusted resource to assist in improving the administration of justice and promoting confidence in the judiciary.



The Administrative Office of the Courts

Michelle Long, Esq.
Director

Rachel Harmon, Esq.
Deputy Director

The Administrative Office of the Courts provides support to the Tennessee Supreme Court and the entire state court system. The director, appointed by the Supreme Court, is the chief administrative officer for the courts and leads the AOC.

The AOC supports the judiciary through:

- Education
- Fiscal oversight of the state court system budget
- Information Technology Services
- Human Resources
- Boards & Commissions support
- Committee support
- Management of the Indigent Representation Fund
- Judicial Designations
- Communications and Media Support
- Contract & Lease Management
- Legislative Tracking
- Technology Support

The AOC also trains juvenile court staff, licenses and educates mediators, oversees the court reporter system, and tests and licenses court interpreters.

The 2023-2025 Strategic plan includes the implementation of Performance Management, 6 new judgeships, a focus on court technology, indigent representation system improvements, judge safety, internal and external communication and a new Court Salary Plan.



Courtroom Security



700+ Employees



12 + annual conferences



200+ press releases



\$198M
Court system Budget



6.2 million TNCourts.gov
views



Judicial Safety



Strategic Planning

FY 2023

The Administrative Office of the Courts

Education

JUDICIAL EDUCATION
MANAGER

John R. Crawford, Esq.

The Education Division manages educational conferences statewide and works with each conference to develop quality education programs that help judges, clerks, and staff navigate changing laws and develop best practices.



1200+ conference attendees

Indigent Representation

LEAD ATTORNEY

Joe Byrd, Esq.

In 2023 the Indigent Services Team was formed to improve efficiency in the administration of the indigent representation program. The team educates users on the software system used for claims (ACAP) through a monthly newsletter and podcast, Appointed Counsel.



Claims processing within
30 days

Access, Innovation & Community

DIRECTOR

Anne-Louise Wirthlin, Esq.

The AICE team promotes access to the legal system, especially for those with limited resources through partnerships with legal aid organizations lawyers, mediators, law students, and others. Key programs include court mediation, court interpreters, Supreme Court Pro Bono Recognition Program and the TN Justice Bus.



Supported 55 clinics
Serving 600+ people

Communications

DIRECTOR

Samantha Fisher

The Office of Communications & Judicial Resources manages media inquiries and high-profile court cases as well as overseeing the TN Courts website, social media accounts, and live streaming of appellate oral arguments. The division produces four newsletters and two educational podcasts.



80% of users new to the
website each year

The Administrative Office of the Courts

Intergovernmental

DIRECTOR

Michelle Consiglio-Young, Esq.

The Intergovernmental Affairs Division provides insight and counsel on the potential impact of draft legislation and coordinates fiscal impact statements on proposed legislation impacting the court system on multiple bills.



450 bills reviewed

Fiscal

DIRECTOR

Dalton Hensley

The Fiscal Division manages finances, accounting, and budgeting for the court system. The team worked extensively with the state Comptroller in 2023 on an extensive audit, the results of which will soon be available.



Total budget for court system
\$198 million;
.3% of state budget

Legal Counsel

AOC GENERAL COUNSEL

John Coke, Esq.

The Legal Division provides legal counsel to judges, reviews all judicial contracts, and drafts and interprets policies. The Legal Division also manages the judicial designation and vacancy processes and produces several publications, including the Tennessee Criminal Justice Handbook.



Trial Court Vacancy Commission
FY22-24: 14 meetings; 55 candidates interviewed

Technology

CHIEF TECHNOLOGY
OFFICER

Brandon Bowers

The Information Technology Services Division manages dozens of projects each year ranging from major network, security, and hardware upgrades to launching new applications and data collection projects.



2000 users Migrated to
Microsoft 365



Implementation of 150 sites
on the SD-WAN network

Boards and Commissions

The Administrative Office of the Courts provides administrative support for a number of Judicial Boards and Commissions.

Tennessee Board of Law Examiners

The Board of Law Examiners assists the Supreme Court in licensing attorneys. The board, an administrator and staff are responsible for conducting the Tennessee Bar Examination. The board members are appointed by the Supreme Court.

Lisa Perlen, Esq., Executive Director
Justice Jeff Bivins, Judicial Liaison

Board of Professional Responsibility

The Board of Professional Responsibility supervises the ethical conduct of attorneys and investigates attorneys' alleged violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct. The board is comprised of nine lawyers and three non-lawyers, and the members are appointed by the Supreme Court. An administrator and staff serve the board.

Sandy Garrett, Esq., Chief Disciplinary Counsel
Justice Roger Page, Judicial Liaison

Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program

The Tennessee Lawyer Assistance Program assists lawyers, judges, bar applicants and law students who suffer from physical or mental disabilities that result from disease, disorder, trauma or age and that impair their ability to practice or serve. Members are appointed by the Supreme Court. An administrator and staff serve TLAP.

Buddy Stockwell, Esq., Executive Director
Justice Jeff Bivins, Judicial Liaison

Continuing Legal Education

The Commission on Continuing Legal Education monitors CLE requirements and administers the specialization program for attorneys. The commission members are appointed by the Supreme Court.

Michelle Wojciechowski, Esq., Executive Director
Justice Sarah Campbell, Judicial Liaison for Continuing Legal Education

In Memoriam

2023

Honorable Justice William Muecke Barker
Honorable Judge Richard H. Dinkins
Honorable Judge Charles E. Nearn
Honorable Judge Jim T. Hamilton
Honorable Judge Phillip E. Smith
Honorable Judge Arden Lincoln Hill
Honorable Judge Charles D. Susano, Jr.

Honorable Judge Phillip E. Smith
Honorable Judge Arden Lincoln Hill
Honorable Judge Charles D. Susano, Jr.
Honorable Walter Woods Bussart
Honorable Judge Terry Lafferty
Honorable Judge Donn Alan Southern
Honorable Judge Seth Walker Norman

Chief Justice Muecke Barker
(ret.) Chief Justice, Tennessee Supreme Court
September 13, 1941- April 3rd, 2023

Chief Justice William Muecke Barker earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Chattanooga, where he was a member of Sigma Chi Fraternity.

The Chief maintained a close relationship with the University throughout his career. He served as a long-time adjunct professor of political science, teaching classes on the judiciary and constitutional law.

Following his graduation from the University of Cincinnati School of Law, the Chief served in the United States Army as a captain in the Medical Field Service School. After his military service, he began work in the private practice of law with the Chattanooga law firm of Dietzen, Dietzen & Barker.

In 1983, Governor Lamar Alexander appointed Chief Justice Barker as a judge for the Circuit Court in the 11th Judicial District. In a later interview with the Tennessee Bar Foundation, the Chief said that his time in the circuit court was his favorite time on the bench. He loved the good lawyers, exciting cases, and the "intellectual workouts" that the trial court provided.

In 1995, Governor Don Sundquist appointed Chief Justice Barker to the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals. Two years later, he was appointed to the Tennessee Supreme Court. His fellow justices unanimously elected him Chief Justice in September 2005.

During his tenure with the high court, he authored scores of landmark decisions, with opinions in areas of separation of powers, individual rights and liberties, and the administration of the criminal law. As Chief Justice, he was especially passionate about access to justice issues.

"In a judicial career spanning over 25 years, Chief Justice Barker has served the state of Tennessee with honor and integrity. Tennessee is fortunate to have benefited from his long commitment to public service."
— fmr. Governor Phil Bredeson

In Memoriam

Judge Richard H. Dinkins
(ret.) Court of Appeals
August 30, 1952- October 1, 2023

Judge Richard H. Dinkins served on the Court of Appeals from 2008 until his retirement in 2022. Previously, he was Chancellor in Davidson County from 2003 to 2008.

“Judge Dinkins was a true gift to us all. He was a devoted father and ardent member of the Tennessee Judiciary and his beloved First Baptist Church Capitol Hill. He worked diligently throughout his life to bring us close together and to assure that all are afforded equal opportunities. His word was his bond and his legacy will provide guidance for all of us as we go forward.”

-Judge Frank Clement, Court of Appeals

“Judge Dinkins was an excellent judge and friend. His opinions always reflected the thorough research and sound judgment of a first-rate legal scholar. I miss his wise counsel and wonderful stories.”

- Judge Andy Bennett, Court of Appeals

Judge Seth Walker Norman
(ret.) Criminal Court Judge, 20th Judicial District
April 6th, 1934 - September 25, 2023

Judge Seth Norman was considered the father of the state’s recovery court system.

He served in the United States Air Force from 1953 to 1957, including service in the Korean War and missions in Southeast Asia.

In 1960, Judge Norman was elected president of the Davidson County Young Democrats and, soon after, was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives.

He also served as a member of the Tennessee Democratic Executive Committee, as a delegate to the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and on the Democratic National Platform Committee.

He was elected to the bench as a criminal court judge in Nashville in 1990.

In 1997, Judge Norman established the groundbreaking Davidson County Drug Court, one of the first recovery courts in the country, and in 1998, he opened the first court-operated residential drug court in the United States.

Judge Arden L. Hill
(ret.) Criminal Court Judge, 1st Judicial District
February 12, 1925- March 3, 2023

Judge Arden L. Hill served in the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II in both England and France. He attained the rank of Corporal and used his G.I. bill to attend East Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee.

He graduated from the University of Tennessee Law School and worked as an attorney for John Hancock Insurance for several years before being elected General Sessions Judge in Carter County in 1966. He was later elected Criminal Court Judge in 1974 where he served until his retirement in 1998.

Judge Hill was a true outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, camping and watching East Tennessee State University sports. He taught Sunday school and was also well versed in sign language, which he taught for several years.

In Memoriam

Judge Robert Leon Jordan
Senior U.S. District Judge
Chancellor, 1st Judicial District
June 28, 1934- February 2, 2024

Senior U.S. District Judge Robert Leon Jordan served in the U.S. Army from 1954 until 1956. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1958 from the University of Tennessee and his law degree in 1960 from the University of Tennessee College of Law. Jordan began his law practice in Nashville with the firm of Goodpasture, Carpenter, Dale and Woods before becoming a partner in the law firm of Bryant, Price, Brandt, Jordan and Fox in Johnson City in 1971. In 1980, then-Gov. Lamar Alexander appointed him to Tennessee's Chancery Court, and he was elected to a full term in 1982. Jordan was confirmed to the federal bench in 1988 and served as senior judge from 2001 until a few months before his death.

Judge Wheeler A. Rosenbalm
Circuit Court Judge, 6th Judicial District
November 24th, 1937- April 21st, 2024

Judge Rosenbalm was born and raised in Anderson County where he worked on the family farm, farming tobacco and dairy.

Before attending law school at the University of Tennessee, Judge Rosenbalm served six months active duty in the Army Reserves with the 489th Civil Affairs Company. He graduated from the University of Tennessee College of Law in 1964 with high academic honors. Upon graduation and before taking the bar exam, Judge Rosenbalm's academic excellence resulted in his appointment to the faculty of the law school where he taught all the procedural law courses for two years. Throughout his legal career, Judge Rosenbalm was affectionately referred to as "Professor."

In 1966, Rosenbalm entered private practice with the Knoxville firm of Frantz, McConnell and Seymour where he worked as a trial lawyer for the next 24 years. Judge Rosenbalm served 10 years on the Tennessee Board of Bar Examiners and in 1986 he was inducted into the American College of Trial Lawyers. In 1990 he chose to run for election for Circuit Court Judge in Knox County, Division III. Judge Rosenbalm was elected in 1990 and re-elected in 1998 and 2006. He retired from the bench on December 31, 2012.

Thank you for your interest in the Tennessee Court System and its Annual Report. The Administrative Office of the Courts is required by law to issue this annual report reflecting operation of the courts and highlighting those changes, innovations, or recommendations made or introduced to enhance the effectiveness of the courts. For additional information please visit: tncourts.gov



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2023-2024