

TENNESSEE JUDICIARY ANNUAL REPORT

2025



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OPENING MESSAGE



HOLLY KIRBY

Chief Justice

I am honored to reflect on a year marked by progress, innovation, and steadfast commitment to justice.

First, we have made significant headway in enhancing judicial and courthouse safety. In partnership with state and local authorities, we have implemented new safety protocols to better protect judges and court staff.

Second, we have taken a major step forward in modernizing court operations through the development of a statewide court technology solution. This long-term project will streamline case management, improve data sharing and reporting, and provide greater accessibility to our court system across Tennessee.

Finally, the launch of the Appointed Counsel Commission marks a critical milestone in strengthening legal representation for those who cannot afford it.

These advancements affirm our unwavering commitment to a secure, accessible and efficient court system. I am deeply grateful to the judges, clerks, attorneys, court staff and especially our elected leaders who have made this progress possible.

MICHELLE LONG

Director

I am excited to share several significant advancements our judiciary has taken to strengthen the administration of justice while ensuring the safety, accessibility, and efficiency of our courts statewide.

New judicial safety measures, developed in coordination with our elected leaders and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), significantly improve the way threats against judges are reported, tracked, and addressed. Specifically, the Tennessee Supreme Court and the AOC welcomed Jim Holcomb, a combat veteran and former Senior Special Agent to serve in a new role focused on protecting the people who serve Tennessee's judicial system. We have also partnered with DeleteMe, a platform that removes personal data from the internet, to protect our active judges online. In addition, the administration of \$4 million in courthouse security funds has brought nearly all state courthouses into compliance with minimum standards.

This year has also marked the development of the design of a comprehensive, statewide court-technology solution. This initiative will unify and streamline court operations, enabling better case management, improved access to justice, and increased efficiency for all court users. It is a critical step in our strategic vision to modernize court technology and increased efficiency and ease of statewide court data sharing for all court users.

Finally, the formation of the Appointed Counsel Commission will provide new structure, oversight, and accountability to ensure legal services for those who cannot afford them. These initiatives reflect our commitment to advancing innovation, access, and justice. We are grateful to our judges, court staff, attorneys, and community partners who make it all possible. Together, we continue to build a stronger judicial system for all Tennesseans.

ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY

STATEWIDE COURT TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION

The Tennessee Supreme Court Technology Oversight Committee and the AOC are committed to modernizing the State's court system through advanced technology.

Following the Tennessee General Assembly's 2024 legislation that allocated funding to develop and implement a centralized system, the AOC began working with Gartner Consulting, Inc. and the Department of Finance & Administration's Strategic Technology Solutions ("STS") and the Office of the Comptroller.

The target design for a comprehensive statewide solution is comprised of:

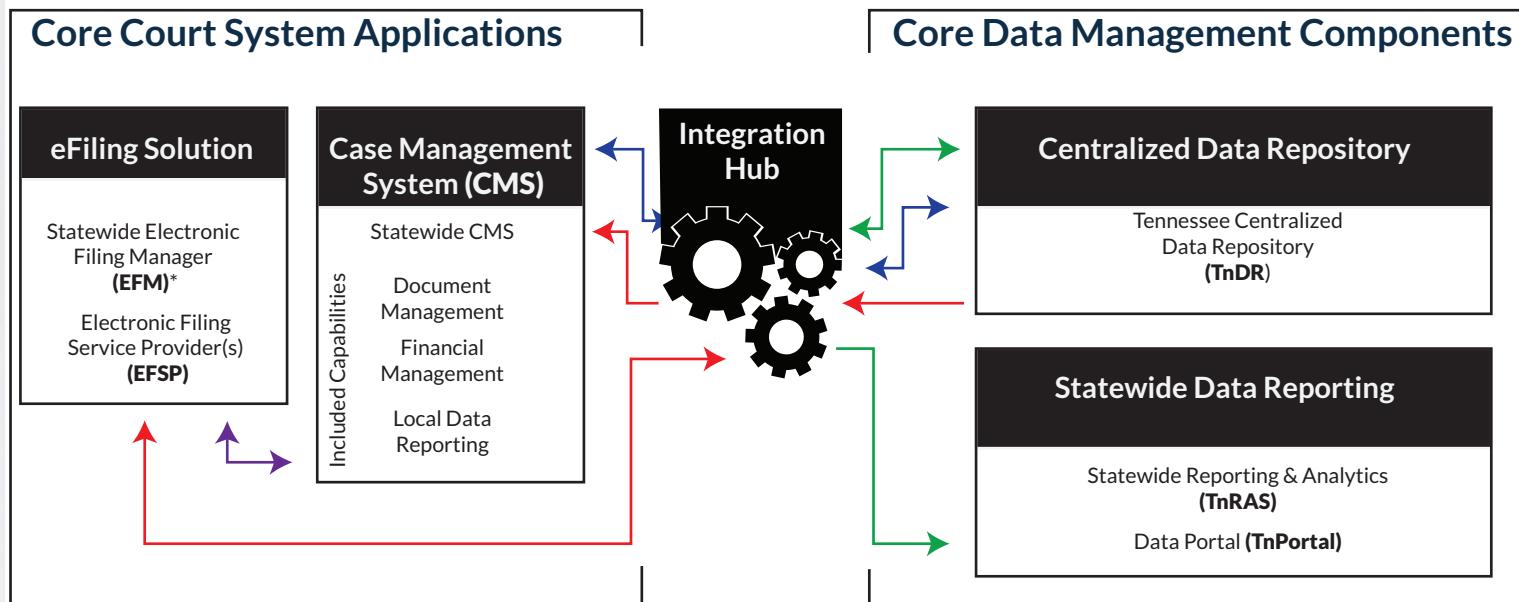
- 1. Core Court System Application:** eFiling and case management.
- 2. Core Data Management Component:** Statewide data repository and data reporting tools (see chart below).
- 3. Public Portal:** Access to publicly available data.
- 4. Integration Hub:** Connects various components and enables justice partner integrations and uniform data sharing between systems.

"Improved use of statewide technology will bring greater efficiency, accessibility, and transparency to the court system. All who are served by or provide services in our court system will benefit. The Court and the AOC appreciate the thoughtful participation of court clerks, justice partners, attorneys, and court users in fact-gathering and design development activities to date. The Court and the AOC extend continued gratitude for the support of the Executive and Legislative Branches in this strategic effort."



- Michelle Long /AOC Director

Target State Design for the Tennessee Court Technology Solution



ADVANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE APPOINTED COUNSEL COMMISSION

The innovative Appointed Counsel Commission is underway thanks to \$13 million in recurring funding to allow flexibility in contracting with attorneys and \$4 million in non-recurring funds.



"I'm excited to help establish a more unified indigent representation system that supports our public defenders, addresses concerns about the appointment process and payment of appointed attorneys, and promotes the appointment of competent counsel. I especially appreciate the cooperation of our eighth judicial district judges for their leadership in the initial phase of this new system."

*Joe Byrd /Interim Executive Director,
Appointed Counsel Commission*



\$17 million total appropriation



14 newly-established positions



76,000 cases a year (estimated)

PRO BONO ACTIVITIES:

The Access, Innovation & Community Engagement (AICE) team partners with legal aid organizations, attorneys and bar associations, mediators, law students, and others to provide pro bono opportunities, legal resources, court mediation, court interpreters, and other essential services.

**most recent data available is FY 2023-2024*



57 legal clinics



Help4TN Helpline
5,178 people



538 people helped by ATJ staff



\$156.9 million in
legal services reported



500 training hours for lawyers and faith leaders



\$1.55 billion provided in
free legal services since 2012

COURT INTERPRETERS

The Tennessee Supreme Court created the court interpreter program for non-English speakers.

- Interpreters in the Credentialing Program- 179
- Registered interpreters- 71
- Registered Languages-16

ADVANCING JUDICIAL SAFETY



CHANGES TO STATE LAW

In March 2025, upon the request of the AOC, lawmakers clarified the retaliation statute in Public Chapter 468 to provide better protection to judges and others with new language that includes threats to "impede, intimidate, and interfere with," thus encompassing current and future actions of the judicial system participant.



NEW JUDICIAL SAFETY PORTAL

In May 2025, the Administrative Office of the Courts and Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) announced the creation of an online portal for direct reporting of threats to the judiciary for investigative and tracking purposes through TBI's Investigative Case Management Software.

The portal is available to any judge, judicial staff, and court system employee on the state, county, or municipal level, who is made aware of a threat against him/herself or against another who works within the judiciary.



NEW JUDICIAL SAFETY OFFICER

The New Judicial Safety Officer position is a first-of-its-kind safety program for Tennessee's judiciary. The Judicial Safety Program Manager will lead a coordinated, proactive strategy to protect the people who serve Tennessee's justice system.

The Judicial Safety Program Manager will oversee the Judicial Threat Portal and:

- Serve as the statewide lead for judicial safety initiatives.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive court security strategy.
- Partner with Court Security Committees to guide statewide improvements.
- Coordinate with the TBI, TDSAHS and other agencies on threat reviews and situational assessments.



"Director Long and I are excited to add this full-time role to serve as the primary liaison across state and local law enforcement, courts, and state agencies and will support the judiciary's independence and integrity by escalating the safety of judges and court personnel statewide."

- Deputy Director Rachel Harmon

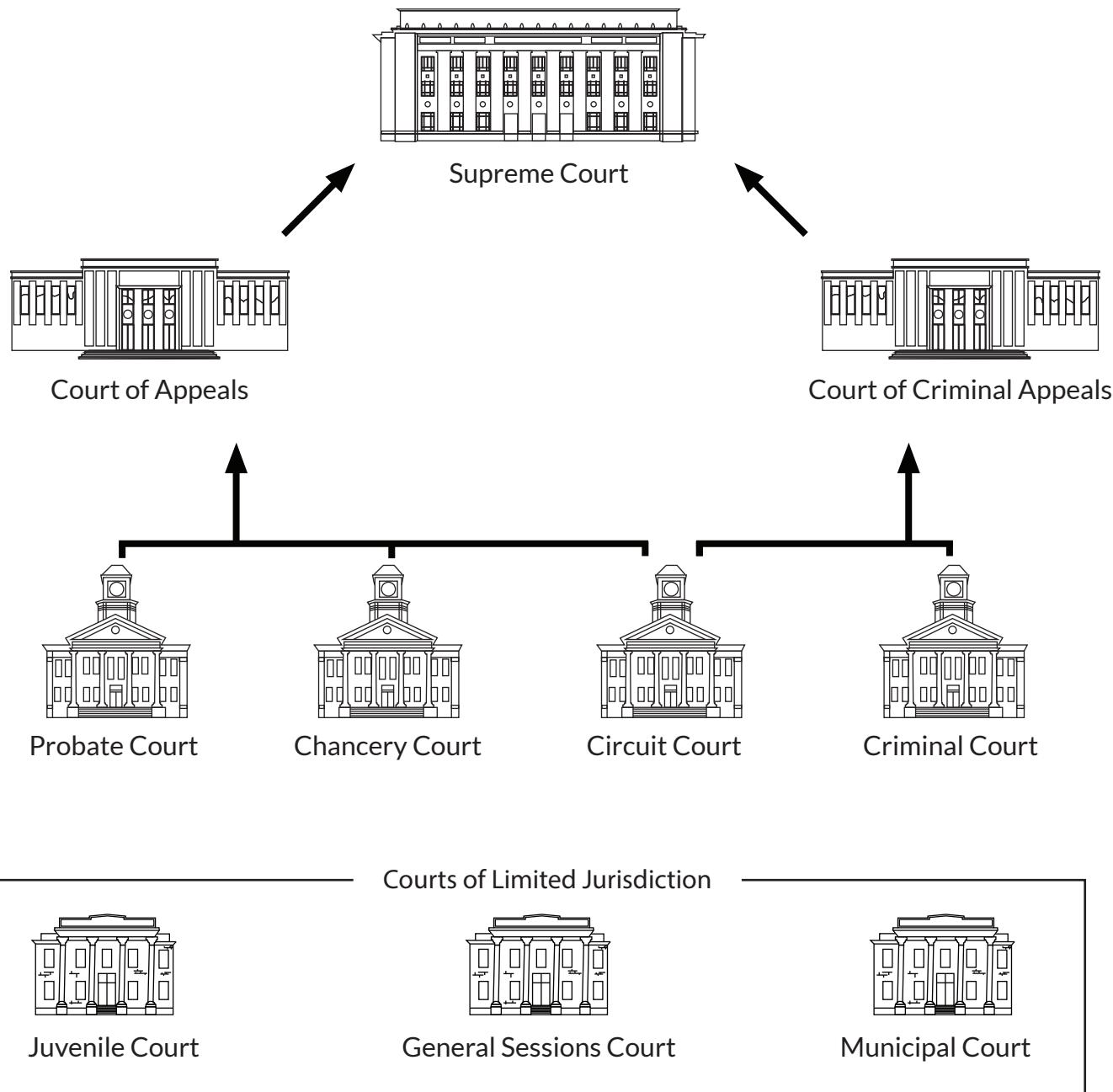
INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF THE TENNESSEE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee judicial system is structured in three levels: appellate courts, trial courts, and courts of limited jurisdiction. Judges in Tennessee are elected, but appellate judges are retained through yes/no retention elections.

The state is divided into **32 judicial districts**, each with its own trial courts.

Each judicial district elects one judge to serve as presiding judge. For a current list of presiding judges, go to: [2024-2025-Tennessee Judicial-Conference-Presiding-Judges-List_12-10-24.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/judicial-conference/presiding-judges-list-12-10-24.pdf)



TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT

APPELLATE COURTS

- Highest court in the state. Five Justices .
- Hears appeals from lower courts.
- Reviews constitutional issues, death penalty cases, and significant legal questions.



(L-R Back Row) Justice Dwight Tarwater, Justice Mary Wagner (L-R Front Row) Justice Jeffrey Bivins, Chief Justice Holly Kirby, Justice Sarah Campbell

CASELOAD DATA



673 Appeals Filed



673 Appeals Finalized



26 Opinions



673 Orders



100% Clearance Rate

JUSTICE MARY L. WAGNER BEGINS TERM ON THE TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT SEPTEMBER 1, 2024



Justice Mary L. Wagner with Governor Bill Lee

TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT

TN SUPREME COURT MEETS WITH GOVERNOR LEE AT JUNE 2025 JUDICIAL CONFERENCE



(Left to Right) Justice Tarwater, Justice Bivins, Governor Lee, Chief Justice Kirby, Justice Campbell, Justice Wagner

THE TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT ACTIVATES A LIMITED DISASTER PLAN IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE HELENE



Chancellor Jim Ripley discussed effect of storm damage in the 4th Judicial District on TN Court Talk: <https://tncourttalk.buzzsprout.com/460429/episodes/15950218-ep-40-judicial-recovery-from-hurricane-helene>

TN SUPREME COURT RETURNS TO HISTORIC SUPREME COURT CHAMBER AT STATE CAPITOL

The Tennessee Supreme Court held court proceedings inside the Old Supreme Court Chamber at the Tennessee State Capitol for the first time in more than ten years. The historic event brought together all three branches of state government -- Executive, Judicial and Legislative under the dome of the Capitol and was available for public viewing through the TN Courts livestream.

"We have the highest caliber of justices to execute justice on behalf of the people in our state, so it's a real proud moment and an historic moment."
-Governor Bill Lee



TN Supreme Court Returns to Historic Supreme Court Chamber at State Capitol

TENNESSEE COURT OF APPEALS

APPELLATE COURTS

- Intermediate appellate court for civil cases.
- Reviews decisions from trial courts (Circuit, Chancery, and others).
- Judges sit in panels of three.



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

CASELOAD DATA



871 Appeals Filed



821 Appeals Finalized



94.26% Clearance Rate

JUDGE VALERIE L. SMITH CONFIRMED TO COURT OF APPEALS

Judge Smith fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Arnold B. Goldin.



Judge Valerie L. Smith stands next to her husband, David Wittman, as she is sworn in by Chief Justice Holly Kirby following confirmation by the TN General Assembly.

TENNESSEE COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS

APPELLATE COURTS

- Intermediate appellate court for criminal cases.
- Handles appeals from trial courts on criminal matters.
- Sits in panels of three judges.



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

CASELOAD DATA



865 Appeals Filed



766 Appeals Finalized



85.5% Clearance Rate

JUDGE STEVE W. SWORD CONFIRMED TO THE COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS

Judge Sword previously served as a Knox County Criminal Court Judge for the 6th Judicial District and filled the vacancy created by the passing of Judge James C. Witt, Jr.



Judge Steven Sword is joined by his wife, Alice Sword, as he is sworn in by Chief Justice Holly Kirby after confirmation by the TN General Assembly.

STATE TRIAL COURTS

TENNESSEE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

CIRCUIT COURTS

- General jurisdiction over civil and criminal cases.
- Handle appeals from lower courts (e.g., General Sessions).
- Found in each judicial district.

CASE LOAD DATA

44,961 Filings
44,684 Dispositions
99% Clearance Rate

CHANCERY COURTS

- Courts of equity.
- Handle cases like divorces, estates, land disputes, and injunctions.

CASE LOAD DATA

56,420 Filings
54,902 Dispositions
100% Clearance Rate

CRIMINAL COURTS

- General jurisdiction over civil and criminal cases.
- Handle appeals from lower courts (e.g., General Sessions).
- Found in each judicial district.

CASE LOAD DATA

148,659 Filings
148,447 Dispositions
100% Clearance Rate

PROBATE COURTS

- Handle wills, estates, guardianships, and conservatorships.
- Found in some counties, otherwise handled by Chancery or Circuit Courts.



STATE TRIAL COURTS

TENNESSEE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

NEW JUDGES



Jennifer Nichols
Circuit Court Judge
18th District



Stephanie Williams
Circuit Court Judge
20th District



S. Curtis Rose
Circuit Court Judge
2nd District



Adrienne Waters-Ogle
Circuit Court Judge
4th District



Joshua Turnbow
Circuit Court Judge
23rd District



Kimberly Lund
Chancery Court Judge
19th District



David Veile
Circuit Court Judge
21st District



Daniel Forrester
Chancery Court Judge
7th District



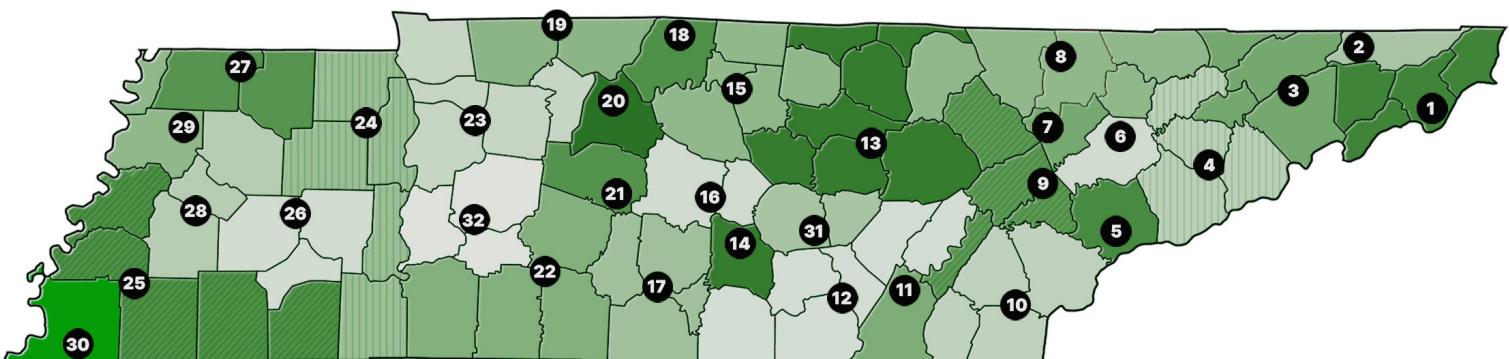
Jessica Parrish
Circuit Court Judge
22nd District



Jeremy Ball
Circuit Court Judge
4th District



Jennifer Peck
Circuit Court Judge
11th District



STATE TRIAL COURTS

TENNESSEE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

WEIGHTED CASELOAD TIME STUDY

The AOC and the Tennessee Judicial Conference Weighted Caseload Committee partnered with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to perform a weighted caseload study from March 31-April 25 2025.

The study measured the amount of time it takes trial judges in Tennessee to process court cases from initial filing to final resolution.

The study data created the weight to be applied to filings data to determine judge need based on caseload across the state.

The NCSC final report and models will be developed after the September 2025 meeting. The Tennessee Comptroller gets the filings from AOC to determine the (judicial) need. The Comptroller will release those annual reports in 2026.

CHANCELLOR DOUG JENKINS ELECTED TENNESSEE JUDICIAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

"It's a great honor, very humbling, and I hope I can get a lot done to help the judges in our state."

- Chancellor Jenkins



Chancellor Doug Jenkins Elected Tennessee Judicial Conference President



"On the judges' side, we had 97% participation. The word that the NCSC used to describe the participation rate was fantastic."

-Chancellor Tony Childress

JUDGE ALEX MCVEAGH ELECTED TBA YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION PRESIDENT

The Young Lawyers Division is dedicated to serving the needs of young lawyers in their first 10 years of practice or under 36 years of age.



Judge Alex McVeagh Takes Office as YLD President

STATE TRIAL COURTS

TENNESSEE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

JUDGE KATHRYN OLITA FIRST WOMAN ELECTED TN TRIAL JUDGES ASSOCIATION (TTJA) PRESIDENT

"I'm excited about continuing to do the good work that our organization has done, especially over the last couple of years. There's been a lot of good cooperation, I would say, between the AOC and the TTJA, and even the leadership of the appellate courts."

- Judge Kathryn Olita



Judge Kathryn Olita

CHANCELLOR TONY CHILDRESS AWARDED TRIAL JUDGE OF THE YEAR AWARD

"There are a number of high caliber trial judges who do a phenomenal job serving this state, their communities, and the judiciary as a whole. I'm humbled and honored to have been the recipient of this award."

-Chancellor Tony Childress



Chancellor Tony Childress

GENERAL SESSIONS COURTS

COURTS OF LIMITED JURISDICTION

- Handle misdemeanors, traffic offenses, small claims, preliminary felony hearings, and civil cases under a monetary threshold.
- No jury trials; decisions can be appealed to Circuit Court.

RONNIE THOMPSON IS ELECTED GENERAL SESSIONS CONFERENCE PRESIDENT 2025-2026

Judge Thompson is a General Sessions judge in Shelby County.



Judge Lonnie Thompson

COUNTY JUDGE'S PATH TO THE BENCH MADE POSSIBLE BY NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBE

Judge Smith was appointed to the 11th Judicial District General Sessions Court and sworn in September 4, 2024. She filled the vacancy left by Judge Alex McVeagh, who was elected to the 11th Judicial District Circuit Court.



"I'm a member of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. It's a federally recognized tribe out of Atmore, Alabama. My family couldn't afford to help with law school, so I knew it was going to be me and student loans. My tribe started an education scholarship. It came into existence just a few years before I started law school, so my tribe helped me pay for law school and I was thankful I was able to graduate debt free."

- Judge Tori Smith

JUDGE JAMES Y. ROSS HONORED WITH 2025 LEON RUBEN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Judge Ross is a General Sessions Judge with Juvenile Court jurisdiction in Wayne County. He is pictured with Judge Victoria Bowling, General Sessions President 2024-2025.



Judge Victoria Bowling, and Judge James Y. Ross

JUDGE BOBBY SANDS HONORED WITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Lifetime Achievement Award is presented to a member of the General Sessions Conference who has exemplified the traits of an outstanding judge and a life dedicated to living in a noble and selfless manner.



Judge Bobby Sands, 22nd Judicial District, stands next to Judge Victoria Bowling

JUVENILE & FAMILY COURTS

COURTS OF LIMITED JURISDICTION

JUVENILE COURTS

- Handle cases involving minors, including delinquency, child abuse/neglect, and custody.
- Found in each county.
- There are 98 juvenile courts across the 95 counties.

FAMILY PRESERVATION INITIATIVE

Tennessee has been a pioneer in the development and implementation of the Family Preservation Initiative (FPI), a pre-petition effort to prevent children and youth from becoming involved with the juvenile justice system.

The Family Preservation Initiative is a partnership between the AOC and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

The NCSC premiered a documentary about the FPI at the “National Convening on the State Courts’ Role in Effective Justice for Young People” in Omaha on March 25, 2025.

“We really wanted to look for an opportunity to do some things differently, to look for a way to engage our young people and engage our families in such a way where we could provide them with much needed services to be able to teach and equip them with the tools necessary for them to be successful.”

-Stephanie Etheridge, Juvenile Court Manager, Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Tennessee has received a number of inquiries from states interested in beginning similar programs as a result. To view the documentary, please click on the following link: <https://vimeo.com/1029774187?share=copy#t=0>

THE TENNESSEE SAFE BABY COURT PROGRAM

The Tennessee Safe Baby Court program began in 2017. It provides support to parents who have children placed in foster care or are at risk of being removed from the home. In 2024-2025, the number of established Safe Baby Courts increased to 26 across the state.



240 cases
125 non-custodial and 115 custodial



428 Tennessee children served

*Quest Management System Data from July 2024-June 2025

JUVENILE & FAMILY COURTS

COURTS OF LIMITED JURISDICTION

SIX NEW SAFE BABY COURTS ESTABLISHED IN FISCAL YEAR 2025, EXPANDING INTO BLOUNT COUNTY

In April 2025, Blount County launched its own Safe Baby Court which is run out Blount County's Juvenile Court office. The program engages community service partners to help support families in the juvenile court system with housing, transportation, mental health and legal services.

 **Grundy County Safe Baby Court** ...

Sep 12, 2024 • 

Last week, we celebrated the reunification of this 15 month child with BOTH parents! These parents wasted no time, and hit the ground running when their child was removed. They've proven that they were dedicated to their sweet little one, and now they've been reunited! This is also a case where the foster parents worked right alongside the parents toward the same goal. They developed such a strong bond throughout this journey. In child welfare, foster parents like these are such an asset, and they are appreciated. We are so thankful for this family's hard work in Safe Baby Court and wish them all the best in the future!



"Children are their most vulnerable and most resilient at this age, so if children are removed from their home into the child welfare system at this age, the long-term effects of that trauma are significant."

*- Blount County Juvenile Court Judge Kenlyn Foster
(WATE news report April 9, 2025)*



JUVENILE & FAMILY COURTS

COURTS OF LIMITED JURISDICTION

JUVENILE COURTS DATA

Juvenile court data is collected and tracked through Quest, a Statewide Case Management System. The adoption of Quest continues to improve the consistency and reliability of juvenile court data statewide.



By the end of 2025, 74 of Tennessee's 98 juvenile courts are expected to be operating on Quest.



AUGUST 2024

Judge Andy Brigham
Receives the Tennessee
Council of Juvenile and
Family Court Judges Lifetime
Achievement Award.



AUGUST 2025

Alan Calhoun First
Magistrate to Receive the
McCain-Abernathy Award.



SAFE BABY COURTS

AOC Court Initiatives
Coordinator Ryan Graham
works closely with the Safe
Baby Court Statewide Team.

PUBLIC OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

LIVESTREAMING

Oral Arguments in the state appellate courts have been live streamed starting in April of 2020 on the YouTube channel TNCourts: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGTpv7Hzq4Oc8S4RDboVvAA>



Total Views
144,345



Total Cases Streamed
398



New Subscribers
1,029



Total Impressions
2,439,079
(when TNCourts videos are suggested to other viewers)

TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT



Total Cases Streamed
18



Total Views
11,666

TOP 5 VIEWED CASES

Tinsley Properties, LLC Et Al. v. Grundy County, Tennessee	2,509
State of Tennessee v. Pervis Tyrone Payne	901
Gary Wygant, Et Al. v. Bill Lee, Governor, Et Al.	668
State of Tennessee v. Ambreia Washington	599
Brian Coblenz Et Al. v. Tractor Supply Company	576

PUBLIC OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

LIVESTREAMING

The Appellate Courts also hear oral arguments in locations around the state, offering the opportunity for students to experience the judicial process first hand. These arguments are also livestreamed by the AOC with remote livestreaming equipment.



Left to Right: Judge Tom Greenholtz, Judge Jill Bartee Ayers, Judge Kyle A. Hixson



"The audience that you have before you today, most of them, are first year law students in the midst of drafting their first appellate brief," Professor Usman said. "They are in the midst of preparing for their first appellate argument and so you have an audience that is going to be particularly rapt for learning exactly what they should be doing and how to do this well."

Judge Jeffrey Usman

Court of Criminal Appeals at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

The CCA heard three cases in the Roth Grand Reading Room at UTC October 23, 2024. All UTC students had the opportunity to observe the legal process.



L-R On the Bench: Judge W. Neal McBrayer, Judge Andy D. Bennett, Judge Kristi Davis. Foreground: Appellate Court Clerk James M. Hivner

Court of Appeals at Belmont College of Law

The COA heard oral arguments at Belmont College of Law March 11, 2025 and engaged in a lengthy question and answer session with law students afterward.

PUBLIC OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION PODCASTING

TN 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.



Total Episodes
27



Downloads
10,825



Total Time Listened
685 Hours



Judge Mike Spitzer is interviewed by Joette Giroux at the AOC.

TN Court Talk also features episodes highlighting important historical figures and cases in Tennessee.

Andrew Jackson VI Podcast
259 Downloads

Scopes Podcast
529 Downloads



PUBLIC OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

JUSTICE BUS

The Justice Bus is a mobile law office that serves Tennesseans in rural and underserved communities. The bus is outfitted with technology to provide on-the-spot legal help.



Alyvia Bush, Justice Bus Coordinator, stands with John Murphy, Correctional Counselor, after a general legal advice clinic hosted by the Knox County Department of Corrections.



WestCare TN staff members pose in front of the Tennessee Justice Bus in Johnson City after a general legal advice clinic.



60+ - Justice Bus events



30+ - Counties visited

JUDICIAL EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCES

The Administrative Office of the Courts 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 navigate changing laws and develop effective practices.



Jarrod Walker operates event video production.



Ariel Borne receives public service award.

SCALES

Through the Supreme Court Advancing Legal Education for Students (SCALES), high school students learn about the judicial branch in their local communities. In 2025 Oral Arguments were held at Tennessee Tech and Bryan College, Dayton, TN.

The SCALES initiative started in 1995. To view a video about the SCALES program, click here: [Supreme Court Advancing Legal Education for Students \(SCALES\) | Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts](#)



Chief Justice Holly Kirby stands with a student.



Justice Sarah Campbell is interviewed about SCALES.



Justices hear arguments in the auditorium of Austin Peay State University.

TENNESSEE ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The AOC has built upon the success of the Online Dispute Resolution Pilot Program (ODR) with Erlanger Health with an online platform that will provide a user friendly interface for medical dept resolution without the necessity of court intervention. The new Tennessee Online Dispute Resolution Portal signifies a substantial advancement in the efficiency and accessibility of dispute resolution services and will serve a second hospital, Nashville General Hospital.



Matters Resolved
**324 patients/guarantors/
families accounts**



Debt Resolved
\$786,692.43



Charity Care Provided
\$ 39,576.52



THREE JUDGE PANEL

The Three-Judge Panel statute, enacted in 2021 via Public Chapter 566, created a special system of panels of three judges from across the state to hear civil actions challenging the constitutionality of state laws, executive orders, or administrative rules.

Once the Supreme Court determines that the civil action meets the criteria for the three-judge panel, it will appoint the judge originally assigned to the case within their grand division and one other judge from each of Tennessee's other two grand divisions to hear and decide the case.



Cases Appointed to the
Three-Judge Panel
36



Pending Cases
13



Resolved Cases
23

Caseload information up to July 29, 2025

The resolved cases, along with those for which the three-judge panel has issued a final order but are still pending, have attracted significant public interest. They include:

HIGH PROFILE CASES

Case Name: Leah Gilliam vs. David Gerregano et al.

A Tennessee vehicle owner sued the State under the First and Fourteenth Amendments after her personalized license plate was revoked on the grounds that the alphanumeric combination was offensive. The Three-Judge Panel held the license plate constituted government speech and therefore entered judgment in favor of the State. The Tennessee Supreme Court ultimately upheld the judgment of the Panel.

Case Name: Terry Rainwaters, et al. v. Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, et al.

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) officers entered the plaintiffs' properties without a warrant or consent, seeking to enforce restrictions upon hunting.

The plaintiffs sued under the Tennessee Constitution's Fourth Amendment analogue, asserting that the statute authorizing these entries is unconstitutional.

The Three-Judge Panel determined that Tennessee Constitution offered broader protections than the federal Fourth Amendment and therefore a statute authorizing warrantless entry onto protected property was facially unconstitutional and unconstitutional as applied. The TWRA appealed.

The appellate court reversed the Panel on the facial challenge because some entries under statute were constitutional since certain land even if privately owned remains constitutionally unprotected, but it affirmed as to the as-applied challenge because the properties in question in this case were protected.

The State elected not to seek an appeal with the Tennessee Supreme Court.

THREE JUDGE PANEL

Case Name: The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee et al. vs. Bill Lee et al. (Racetrack)

In this consolidated case, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County sued the State over legislation that changed the requirement for a supermajority vote on matters related to facilities owned by Metro to a simple majority vote. The Panel determined that the new law violated the Local Legislation Clause of the Home Rule Amendment because it reasonably could only apply to Nashville and Davidson County. The State elected not to appeal this decision.

Case Name: The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County vs. Bill Lee et al. (Airport)

The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County again sued the State over legislation it argued was targeted against it alone in violation of the Home Rule Amendment and the Equal Protection Guarantee by wording the legislation to appear general in nature but in effect altering the governance of only the Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority. The Three-Judge Panel agreed, concluding that the Act violated the Home Rule Amendment and the Equal Protection Guarantee under the Tennessee Constitution. The Court of Appeals upheld the Panel's conclusion as to the Home Rule Amendment but reversed as to the Equal Protection grounds. The Tennessee Supreme Court has accepted the State's petition to appeal.

Case Name: Gary Wygant et al. vs. Bill Lee et al.

In this matter, the plaintiffs sued the State, challenging the Tennessee General Assembly's reapportionment plans of the Tennessee House of Representatives and Tennessee Senate for violating separate provisions of the Tennessee Constitution.

The majority of the Panel concluded that the House's redistricting plan was constitutional but that the Senate's redistricting plan was unconstitutional. The Panel therefore ordered the State to draw new maps for the State Senate districts. Both sides appealed the decision directly to the Tennessee Supreme Court, whose decision is still pending.

Case Name: The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee et al. vs. Bill Lee et al. (Council)

The Metro Government of Nashville, filed a lawsuit against the State, arguing that new legislation that restricted all metropolitan governments to legislative bodies with twenty or fewer seats violated the Home Rule Amendment because Nashville-Davidson County is the only metropolitan government with a legislative body that has more than twenty seats.

The Three-Judge Panel concluded that the statute violated the Home Rule Amendment of the Tennessee Constitution as well as a provision that exempted metropolitan governments from a legislative seat cap.

The appellate court reversed the Panel's judgment, concluding that the legislation still applied to the other metropolitan governments even if they were not required to take immediate action to comply with it and that the exemption provision in the Tennessee Constitution exempted metropolitan governments from the legislative seat cap contained in the Tennessee Constitution, not other such limits.

The Tennessee Supreme Court has accepted this case for an appeal.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

2025

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 Sarah K. Campbell, 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 Holly Kirby, 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.

Dr. Buddy Stockwell, Esq., Executive Director
Chief Justice Jeffrey S. 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 Mary L. Wagner Judicial Liaison

THE AOC LEADERSHIP TEAM



MICHELLE LONG

Director

The Director Serves the Tennessee Court System under the leadership of the Tennessee Supreme Court. She interacts with leadership in all three branches of state government on a regular basis. The Director, in alignment with the Tennessee Supreme Court, sets the strategic direction of the AOC as well as policies and procedures. The Director oversees the AOC executive leadership team, which is comprised of eight division directors. The Director meets with the Tennessee Supreme Court during its monthly business conference and its members regularly.

RACHEL HARMON

Deputy Director

The Deputy Director works closely with courts and judicial staff at all levels, as well as state and local government partners. In conjunction with the Director, the Deputy Director helps carry out the AOC's strategic plan and oversees the Communications, Human Resources, Judicial Education, and Judicial Safety teams and serves as the Supreme Court's liaison to the Judicial Ethics Committee.

BRANDON BOWERS

Chief Technology Officer

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

MICHELLE CONSIGLIO-YOUNG

Intergovernmental Affairs Director

The Intergovernmental Affairs Division provides insight and counsel on the potential impact of draft legislation, handles legislative initiatives on behalf of the TN Supreme Court and the AOC, and assists with fiscal impact statements that affect the court system. The Juvenile Team, Court Improvement Program, and Three-Judge Panel System sit within this division. This division also acts as the primary AOC contact for the Advisory Commission on the Rules of Practice & Procedure as well as the Board of Judicial Conduct.

SAMANTHA FISHER

Communications Director

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, newsletters and podcast production.

THE AOC LEADERSHIP TEAM



DALTON HENSLEY

Fiscal Director

The Fiscal Division manages finances, accounting, and budgeting for the court system.



JAY MILLER

General Counsel

The Legal Division provides counsel to the AOC. It works closely with judges and judicial staff on all levels. It reviews contracts and drafts and interprets policies, handles designations for the Chief Justice, handles public records requests for the AOC and state judiciary, and serves as administrative support to the Trial Court Vacancy Commission and Governor's Council for Judicial Appointments.



ANNE-LOUISE WIRTHLIN

Access, Innovation & Community Engagement Director

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, TN Faith & Justice Alliance, Supreme Court Pro Bono Recognition Program and the TN Justice Bus.

RETIREMENTS

RETIRED JUDGES 2024-2025



Justice Roger A. Page
Tennessee Supreme Court



Judge Robert Lincoln
Washington County General
Sessions Court



Judge James H. Bradberry
Weakley County Juvenile Court



Judge Mike Spitzer
32nd Judicial District
Circuit Court



Judge Cheryl Blackburn
20th Judicial District
Criminal Court



Judge Paula Skahan
Shelby County Criminal Court



Chancellor Jim Kyle
30th Judicial District



Judge David Allen
22nd District Circuit Court



Judge Arnold B. Goldin
Court of Appeals Western Section

IN MEMORIAM

2025



JUDGE O. DUANE SLOWNE JANUARY

19, 1963- AUGUST 25, 2024

O. Duane Slone, Circuit Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District, served with excellence for over twenty-five years on the bench. He was known for his fairness, knowledge of the law, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage. He pioneered numerous programs and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of those in his community.

In 2009 he established the Drug Recovery Court for the Fourth Judicial District, offering those in the criminal justice system an opportunity to address drug and alcohol addictions and co-occurring mental health issues.

Judge Slone founded Fourth Judicial District Recovery Services to help address the issue of neonatal abstinence syndrome.

In 2013 Judge Slone created and implemented TN-ROCS, Tennessee Recovery Oriented Compliance Strategy, which has resulted in reduction of crime, reduced jail population, and an increase in healthy births. In 2014, Judge Slone established the Recovery Cabin in Jefferson County which provides housing and recovery support for women. More than 20 healthy babies have been born to residents of the Recovery Cabin. The Fourth Judicial District Drug Recovery Court and the TNROCS initiative have been models for other Judicial Districts across the State of Tennessee, the Southeast, and the United States.

Judge Slone served as the Chairman of the Tennessee Judicial Opioid Initiative, Chairman of the Tennessee Judicial Conference Problem Solving Committee, and Chairman of the 8 State Appalachian-Midwest Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative. He served as a member of the National Judicial Opioid Task Force, the SAMHSA Advisory Committee for Women's Services, the Substance Misuse and Addiction Resources for Tennessee Justice Network, and assisted numerous other local, state, and national efforts.

Judge Slone was the recipient of many awards throughout his career including the National Center for State Courts "William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence," the nation's highest judicial honor, which he received in 2019.



JUDGE JOE D. DUNCAN

FEBRUARY 11, 1924 -AUGUST 20, 2024

Judge Duncan was admired for his work ethic, his legendary patience, and his even-handedness in his treatment of trial lawyers whether representing the prosecution or the defense. In 1990, Judge Duncan retired from the Court of Criminal Appeals

IN MEMORIAM

2025

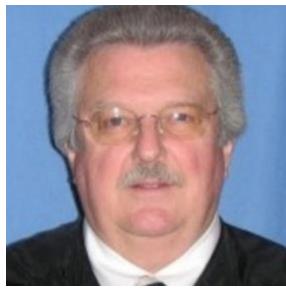


JUDGE ROBERT ERNEST CUPP JR.

AUGUST 26, 1939 – FEBRUARY 4, 2025

Over the course of his distinguished legal career, Judge Robert Ernest Cupp, Jr., served as Assistant District Attorney General, Director of Legal Services of Upper East Tennessee, and again as Assistant District Attorney General for the First Judicial District. In 1998, he was elected as Criminal Court Judge of the First Judicial District, which encompasses Carter, Johnson, Unicoi, and Washington counties. He served with distinction for sixteen years until his retirement in 2014.

Judge Cupp was widely respected for his integrity, fairness, and dedication to justice. His commitment to the law extended beyond the courtroom, as he also served as a facilitator for the National Judicial College in Sun Valley, Idaho; Reno, Nevada; and West Yellowstone, Montana. He brought a wealth of knowledge and a spirit of mentorship to judges across the country.



CHANCELLOR E.G. MOODY

DECEMBER 23, 1944 - JUNE 16, 2024

Honorable Chancellor Edgar Garrison Moody, retired Chancellor for the 2nd Judicial District, possessed remarkable intelligence in addition to an ability to apply common sense to every situation. He approached his judgeship with patience, humility, integrity, courage, a steady demeanor, and the ability to think creatively. Chancellor Moody made significant contributions to the legal and the local community. Every year, Chancellor Moody and his wife, Mary Frances, hosted an annual adoption day event at their farm in Bristol. This event was a collaboration of many members of the local community. Although the location of the event has changed, Chancellor Moody's spirit and heart for the children of Sullivan County continues year after year through the Second Judicial District Annual Adoption Day.



JUDGE JAMES CURWOOD WITT, JR.

OCTOBER 23, 1948 - AUGUST 17, 2024

Honorable James Curwood Witt, Jr., also known as "Curwood," was born in Madisonville, Tennessee, on October 23, 1948, to parents Hon. James Curwood Witt, Sr. and his wife Gloria. He graduated from Madisonville High School in 1966 and earned degrees with honors from Hiwassee College and Tennessee Wesleyan College. Judge Witt graduated from the University of Tennessee College of Law in 1973 and was a member of the Order of the Coif. He was appointed as a judge for the Monroe County Juvenile Court in 1978 and practiced as an attorney in Madisonville, Tennessee from 1982-1997.

In 1997, after being sworn in by his proud father, Judge James Curwood Witt, Sr., Judge Witt was appointed to the State of Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals by Governor Don Sundquist, where he served for 27 years until his passing.

TENNESSEE JUDICIARY ANNUAL REPORT 2025



511 Union Street,, Suite 600 | Nashville, TN 37219

Thank you for your interest in the Tennessee Court System. 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