

Interbranch Advisory Committee (IAC) Meeting
March 14, 2025, from 2pm-4pm

Justice González introduced a motion to change the Supreme Court Co-Chair from Justice González to new Chief Justice Debra Stephens. Motion from Senator Pedersen, second by Judge Bowman. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee members in the room and attending remotely introduced themselves.

Judicial Branch Updates

- The written State of the Judiciary has detailed updates.
- Education cycle for the branch – we have had a historic turnover of judicial officers, during a time when we have a lot of new legislation that impacts our work, changes in court rules and operations and the need to provide ongoing training. Next weekend is the first of the spring training cycles in an education event involving all of the appellate courts, judges and commissioners. We will also have a joint business meeting where our court clerks and administrators get involved as well. Followed by the Superior Court Judges Association (SCJA) and Court Administrators meeting and then District and Municipal Court Judges (DMCJA) Association and Court Administrators will meet.
- Some highlights:
 - We are refreshing and pushing out information about civil arrests at court houses and the courts obligations in light of the executive orders. We are offering a webinar next week to go through some practical nuts and bolts of Washingtons statutory framework under the Courts Open to All Act and the general rule. The materials are on our website. We appreciate cooperation and collaboration across branches. We are offering a “Better Together” webinar to understand the dynamics of the court and how all the pieces work together. There will be follow-up at the spring conferences. We need to work with court to strengthen partnership between court staff and judicial officers.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies – it’s still an issue, how it impacts evidence, testimony, and the litigant experience.
- At our last Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) meeting, the BJA unanimously adopted a statement of principles (not policy) regarding AI. Focusing on not compounding bias, individual privacy and security, enhancing access to justice rather than impeding, and public trust and confidence in the judicial system.
- Other ongoing BJA work, we have had a hard-working remote proceedings work group. The work of that group is intended to sunset at the end of this fiscal year. One final piece of that during wrap up is that we need to finalize sunseting the last of the court orders to make sure everything is covered.
- The BJA unanimously adopted a new strategic initiative, building on work that the Gender and Justice Commission (GJC) has been engaged in, to focus on workplace harassment. We’ve convened a task force that will look at data collection, best practices, and training.

- The GJC co-chair will be Judge Janet Hellson from King County Superior Court and there will also be a BJA Court Education Committee (CEC) co-Chair for the new strategic priority/ initiative.
- Inviting key legislators to Judicial Leadership Summit on June 13. More information to come on that.
- Media outreach - Yesterday the Supreme Court hosted a reception of media professionals here at the Supreme Court. We have the longest standing Bench-Bar-Press Committee in the country. For over 30 years, we have helped build better media relationships. We have a liaison committee that helps navigate when there are conflicts around open courts, individual privacy and security media requests. We want to better work with the media to ensure responsibility and how judicial decisions are reported.
- On May 30, we will have the second Media/Court Symposium called Justice and Journalism. This summit will bring together media and court professionals at seven different community colleges across the state connected through a video conferencing system so everyone can communicate with everyone. We will have panelists of journalists and courts that will each explain what their needs are.
- Supreme Court Rules Committee and En Banc indigent criminal defense proposal. The Supreme Court held two public meetings last fall and there have been many different proposals coming in. The Supreme Court has had a series of work sessions, but do not want to rush the process.

2025 Policy Priorities Update

Brittany Gregory, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Office of Judicial & Legislative Relations

- [SHB 1144](#): Adding an additional superior court judge in Skagit County (Lekanoff)
 - Did not make it out of the House.
- [2SHB 1174](#): Concerning court interpreters (Peterson)
 - Passed out of the House (66-31-1)
- [HB 1510](#): Including appellate commissioners in the PERS Judicial Benefit Multiplier Program (Hill)
 - Did not make it out of Appropriations
- [SSB 5133](#): Concerning departures from the guidelines for caregiver status (C. Wilson)
 - Did not make it out of the Senate
- Judicial Officer Personal Information Confidentiality
 - Did not bring bill. Worked with the Secretary of State and their Address Confidentiality Program Manager to clarify and amend the application process for judicial officers.

Proposals anticipated for next session:

- Additional Superior Court Judge(s):
 - Skagit County (SHB 1144)
 - Cowlitz County
 - Yakima County
 - Asotin, Columbia, & Garfield Counties

- Adding appellate commissioners to the PERS Judicial Benefit Multiplier Program (HB 1510).
- Adding caregiver status as a mitigating factor for exceptional sentences (SSB 5133).
- Court security and adding Court of Appeals Bailiffs.
- Other bills that did not pass this session but that have a potentially significant impact on the judiciary.

2025 Judicial Branch Budget Updates

Christopher Stanley, AOC Chief Financial and Management Officer

- The share of the judicial budget of the state budget is very small - 8% of the general fund budget.
- A lot of the funding is a pass-through. Only 26% of the funds stay in the agency and 74% are distributed out to communities to fund judges, therapeutic courts, public defense, civil legal aid, etc. The major impact is in the community – money going to places we live in Washington.
- Amended biennial budget request - cut out new programs/staffing, mirrored executive branch in proposing cuts. The changes have been ratified by BJA.
- Cutting technology, Judicial Needs Estimate, and reduced education, leadership events and self-help centers.
- Cut packages that would have helped staff go into courts, expand research into domestic violence and family law, and enhance the behavioral health program.
- Did not cut or reduce packages to IT infrastructure— the security issue showed how important court security is. We have a lot of great staff and tools and we need to keep that functional. Also, we will support an increase in contracts for technology services.
- As part of 6% reduction exercise, AOC submitted a reduction of 6% from our base (\$8 million). Anything beyond that will start to cause serious pain to court programs and services and will impact judicial operations.
- Representative Taylor: 26% remaining at AOC, 74% flows into communities, curious at what we're charging in the 26%?
 - A lot of our IT staff and staff that help implement programs (technical support, therapeutic courts, guardianship team, trial court support, Blake).
 - The \$8 million we reduced comes from transfer to Judicial Information System.
- Commissioner Meija: Concerned with cuts to jurisdictions, especially around conversation with cuts to the judiciary.
- Chief Justice Stephens: The remaining 26% at AOC is not just administration, AOC has a responsibility to run different aspects of supporting state courts. They help with IT support, research center, help implement policy decisions, including legislative decisions. What we need to recognize is a lot of stuff we need to build. We are very aware that local budget cuts could impact the courts.
- Justice González: push back on the analogy and the comparison of AOC to a Non-profit. Within AOC there are programs like the Interpreter and Language Access Commission that provide training, licensing, and follow-up. That's not the kind of overhead a pass-through non-profit might have. We've had tremendous turnover in courts. We need education for judges, but will not get it if education gets cut.

- LaTricia Kinlow: We have over 200 Courts of Limited Jurisdiction (CLJ) and 39 Superior Courts, Court of Appeals (COA), and Supreme Court. AOC is responsible for educating not only judges, but well over 2,000 people, which includes court staff. If you start doing research into what it takes to book locations to have trainings and what it cost now from before COVID, it is astronomical. When we talk about cutting education the public will suffer. AOC needs the money. We have been trying to increase the money for a number of years. When talking to legislators, give them the numbers for the Supreme Court, Superior Courts, CLJs, and the appellate courts.

Legislative Updates

Senator Jamie Pedersen, Senate Majority Leader

- Acknowledgement of the proactive approach of the judiciary regarding cuts.
- There might be additional cuts as well. Almost all policy adds are gone. This is not a year of investment in new programs. There is a shortfall of \$12million dollars. The revenue forecast will come out next Tuesday. We are not likely to receive better news. The federal administration might drive a recession, especially for trade states like Washington.
- We will roll out budgets in the House and Senate between Saturday, March 22nd and Monday, March 24th. The Senate will be the vehicle and will be heard and passed out of committee. House Appropriations will move the same week on the House budget. Conferences on the budget will happen around March 31st. There is a bit of a difference in revenue between the House and Senate. Then the Governor has to approve the budget. Can safely say recommendations from Pedersen is consistent with branch recommendations. He is hopeful that it will be a step forward in some investments.

Representative Jamila Taylor, 30th Legislative District

- Filed HB 1909, that did not get out of Appropriations because of the concerns with Governor Ferguson not wanting any more taskforces or commissions. We barely got out HB 1219, authorized interbranch advisory committee. Still concerned that he will veto that bill and that this committee might sunset in January 2026. HB 1621 Court Commissioners, we added an emergency clause. The Hope Card fix bill HB 1460 moved quickly. Heard SJM 8006 concerning the Limited License Legal Technician (LLLT) program in the House today and would like to hear from the Supreme Court and WSBA on your thoughts regarding this memorial. It would be helpful to know why the program sunset and thoughts on the potential expansion of practice areas for the LLLT. (Senator Pedersen: Not a bill, but it is a joint memorial). Addressing issues through IAC and other committees and commissions. Questions and answers help her talk to her colleagues.

Representative Hunter Abell, 7th Legislative District

- Significant concern about declining public trust in the judiciary and declining trust in the legal profession at large. Introduced a bill to reduce midterm vacancies requiring senate approval for gubernatorial appointments to the COA and Supreme Court, but the Bill did not go anywhere. We are hoping we can continue this conversation. Significant interest in the Pierce County Juror Pay Pilot and the data that comes out of that and introducing that

in new areas. WSBA Ambassador program proposal to deputize attorneys to go out in to the community and hear concerns/educate the public.

Executive Branch Update

Kristin Beneski, Governor Ferguson's Chief Legal Counsel

- Expressed gratitude and appreciation for going through the budget exercise and making the requested cuts. Understand it is difficult and painful, especially for the people of our state.
- Judicial appointments: currently two judicial vacancies that Governor Ferguson will be making appointments to fill; COA Division I and King County Superior Court. We are mindful of the issues being raised with regard to trust in the judiciary. We hope to address some of that through the appointments.
- Examining the process that is currently in place for providing notice of judicial vacancies and the uniform application process for those interested in being considered for appointment to those vacancies. Looking at the process for providing notice of vacancies and to modernize and update the questionnaire that serves as the application. They welcome feedback on the process.

Committee Member Updates

Judge Kevin Ringus, District and Municipal Court Judges' Association (DMCJA)

- Turnover in the judiciary - All municipal court judges are up for re-election this year and district court judges next year. There has been a huge loss of experience within the Courts of Limited Jurisdiction (CLJs) through retirement or moving up to general jurisdiction courts. DMCJA just hosted a leadership summit with educational funding that was provided in the supplemental budget last year. Thanked the House and Senate for that funding. Sent an email to their entire membership asking the newer judges if they want to be a coach/mentor. We also have two jurist-in residence judges (who are retired) that can help the newer judges navigate both administration, the court room and any other issues that may come their way.

Larry Jefferson, Office of Public Defense (OPD)

- Public defense is still in a state of crisis in terms of learning how to do one's job. Concerned with the lack of access to justice, there are not enough attorneys. OPD can only contract with attorneys. OPD has very little control in directing how those contracted attorneys work. Would like a mandate for attorneys to meet with their clients in a specific time frame so that clients are not being neglected. Wants to be sure lawyers are trained and trained well, on both sides – defense and prosecution. Thankful for the support that was provided by the legislature last year.

Sara Robbins, Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)

- We will see an increase for civil legal aid as changes are occurring in society. Making cuts was very painful because we know that it impacts people directly. Judicial education team that works on eviction defense is preparing to present on UDA and the unlawful

detainer process. We have good trainings on the eviction process and UDA process and can use the existing curriculum in a lot of different ways.

Michael Terasaki, Access to Justice (ATJ) Board

- They are having a huge legal civil aid statewide training conference all next week.

Dawn Marie Rubio, AOC State Court Administrator

- The most recent state of the state courts was done by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) in the last two years has shown an increase in trust in the courts at the national level. Of the three branches within the study the NCSC conducted, the judicial branch was rated the highest. It is helpful to connect with court users to educate them and talk about the work of the court that they don't understand or know about. As an example, therapeutic courts that divert people with substance use disorders and try to work with them to rehabilitate them to prevent recidivism in the future.

Linnea Anderson, Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrators (WAJCA)

- WAJCA is committed to youth and families and transforming obstacles into opportunities. Staff need support to continue to advance ideals while balancing public safety. Grateful for their ongoing partnerships. WAJCA is excited for clearing the path to be part of the state court team that's convening the group on youth justice later this month.

Judge Samuel Chung, Superior Court Judges' Association (SCJA)

- Checked on case filings and it looks like they are almost caught up since Covid, maybe slightly less. In King County, the civil filings have surpassed 2019 levels. Half of the bench has six or less years of judicial experience, requiring education. Turnover is high in Superior Courts with younger/new judges bringing a lot of enthusiasm and willingness to handle new things. The Spring Conference, in the theme of keeping costs low, are meeting at the Red Lion in Port Angeles. The conference will cover an array of topics such as self-represented litigants, domestic violence and courtroom management, judicial wellness, and unlawful detainer. Domestic Violence/Family Law training was done in November 2024 and the second part will take place in June 2025. They are busy working on bills this session. There are a lot of resentencing bills they have been working on. This is Judge Chung's last appearance at these meetings as he is rotating with the current president, Judge Cindy Larson, and he will become past president.

Judge Bill Bowman, Court of Appeals (COA)

- The caseloads are back up to pre-COVID levels. We have been seeing a trend of more complicated criminal and civil cases coming before them. We have a significantly high turnover rate. 14 or 15 of the 22 judges have five years or less on the COA. We are losing Judge Dwyer in Division I who has 30 years of experience. Desperately in need of the judicial education for judges and the staff to make sure they maintain the quality people deserve. Working on efficiency, with the help of the technology we get from the AOC, with a pilot program on how they file cases through a pilot program. Looking forward to Spring Conference.

Susan Speiker, Washington State Association of County Clerks (WSACC)

- We are getting ready for Spring Conference. Thank you to the AOC for the support and helping make sure they have an educational component. The Clerks are discussing many important topics at their upcoming conference like e-filing, text messaging, and guardianship.

Fona Sugg, Association of Washington Superior Court Administrators (AWSCA)

- Thank you to AOC for the education. AWSCA is co-located with SCJA for their Spring Conference. Also, would like to reiterate how small the judicial branch budget is. The new laws that come into play that impact the courts are great, but also are very expensive to implement. They are really thankful for the passthrough funding from AOC to supplement the counties and cities in addition to the technical support from the AOC.

LaTricia Kinlow, District and Municipal Court Management Association (DMCMA)

- AOC has been rolling out CLJ-CMS updates and that has been huge for DMCMA. We realize that our courts need some support with the process, so we are in the process of ramping up our courts helping courts process. We really appreciate the pre-trial services unit at AOC for helping to transform to a restorative focus versus punitive. The cost of interpreters is still a great concern. The cost has been increasing and has not been possible for them to manage their local budget for those costs. The CLJ state associations, DMCJA, DMCMA, and MPA, are coming together to do their second round of a summit to talk about some of things we can do to better support each other.

Christopher Stanley, AOC Chief Financial and Management Officer

- LaTricia has been a great partner with Blake. The Blake outreach has been phenomenal. Thank you to all of our partners. There are 65,000 cases still to claim or \$27 million is sitting on the list waiting to be claimed. Our partners have done amazing work getting cases vacated and getting folks eligible for a refund.

Upcoming Meeting

The next Interbranch Advisory Committee meeting will be held in June.