

July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2017

Nebraska Supreme Court

Strategic Agenda



NEBRASKA JUDICIAL BRANCH STRATEGIC AGENDA 2015-2017

The Nebraska Judicial Branch has six overarching goals for its 2015-2017 strategic agenda. This document identifies those goals and their respective objectives and initiatives. It is essential that in the twenty-first century, the provision of justice is sustained and maintained through a system of impartial, fair, and accessible courts and related services in order to achieve community safety, promote the general welfare, and encourage civility among people. The six overarching goals of the Nebraska Judicial Branch are:

Goal 1: Providing Access to Swift, Fair Justice

Goal 2: Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults

Goal 3: Addressing Community Safety

Goal 4: Being Accountable to the Public

Goal 5: Strengthening Communication with Citizens and Government

Goal 6: Regulating the Legal Profession



GOAL 1: PROVIDING ACCESS TO SWIFT, FAIR JUSTICE



A more detailed strategic plan for statewide court technology is available on the Judicial Branch Web site: www.supremecourt.ne.gov

The role of courts is to swiftly and fairly resolve cases. To accomplish this goal the courts must be impartial, efficient, and accessible for the user. Our judicial system is based upon the principle that all citizens coming before the courts are entitled to equal justice. Courts must ensure that the accused fully understand their rights and that those rights are protected. Courts must provide meaningful access to all, ensuring that no litigant is denied justice due to the lack of counsel or the inability to understand legal proceedings. Victims of crime should have access to resources to assist them through the criminal process. Participants in the court process should have physical access to safe, secure courthouses.

To that end, this strategic goal focuses on the following areas: providing adequate funding for the Judicial Branch; implementing and maintaining modern technology to support the internal work of the courts; enhancing technological access for external court users; processing and managing cases efficiently to resolve disputes in a fair and timely manner; continuously improving access to justice for limited English-speaking litigants and the deaf and hard of hearing; ensuring quality continuing education for judges and staff of the Judicial Branch; addressing bias in the judicial system; providing meaningful assistance to self-represented litigants; integrating alternative dispute resolution approaches to improve how trial and appellate courts conduct their business; and planning for courthouse accessibility and security.

- Funding for the Judicial Branch
- Technology and the Courts
- Fairness in the Judicial System
- Constitutional Rights and Criminal Justice
- Case Management Procedures
- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Self-Represented Litigants
- Limited English-Speaking Litigants and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Courthouse Accessibility, Security, and Continuity of Operations
- Judicial Branch Education

GOAL 2: PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Nebraska's children and families are precious resources. Courts must be able to act swiftly and justly in child abuse and neglect cases so children in these vulnerable situations can be kept safe and cared for while seeking permanency. At the same time, courts must ensure that the rights of the parents are being addressed. In domestic relations cases in which children are involved, courts must be able to offer procedures and resources to decrease children's exposure to parental conflict, as well as make timely decisions so parents have certainty in their roles and responsibilities. Teens involved in juvenile court proceedings require a unique array of interventions from the court and community to address the legal and habilitative concerns of these young people. Judges and court staff must be knowledgeable about the legal, societal, and familial impact of domestic violence on parents and children involved in dissolution or child welfare matters. Additionally, protecting children includes an active role by the court to support permanency for children through legal adoption after timely relinquishment or termination of parental rights. Vulnerable adults are those individuals who, due to disability or aging, require involvement by the courts in terms of conservatorships, guardianships, and related actions. In guardianship and conservatorship matters, a higher level of initial and annual court scrutiny will be realized by establishing the Office of Public Guardian to provide for the protection of this vulnerable population. As the population of our state continues to age, the impact on courts in these arenas will also increase.

- Abused and Neglected Children
- Nebraska Court Improvement Project's Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative
- Children and Families in Domestic Relations Cases
- Juvenile Justice
- Adoption and Termination of Parental Rights
- Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Adults
- Establish the Office of the Public Guardian



GOAL 3: ADDRESSING COMMUNITY SAFETY



A more detailed strategic plan for Problem-Solving Courts is available on the Judicial Branch Web site: www.supremecourt.ne.gov

Courts are required to determine the appropriate sanctions or disposition for individuals who violate the law. When a court determines probation to be the most appropriate action, it must ensure that the individual not only is held accountable, but also is offered rehabilitative services designed to reduce or eliminate future criminal activity. Those individuals, including youth, with histories of substance use or mental illness present a unique challenge. Innovative approaches, such as specialized probation programs, restorative justice, or problem-solving courts, must be considered to reduce recidivism and promote public safety. Successful management of juvenile and adult probation populations requires following proven principles of effective community supervision and using treatment and rehabilitation programs supported by research and experience. It also requires accurate, relevant, and timely information.

Initiatives that enhance probation and community supervision call for increased technology, advanced officer skill competency, access to services, and improved methods to assist individuals with special needs.

In Nebraska, as well as across the country, more specialty courts and specialized probation programs have been established. The utilization of drug and other problem-solving courts results in a significant cost savings to the courts and the state. It is estimated that a tremendous cost savings for the state results when a case is handled through drug court versus incarcerating an individual, for one year. Recidivism rates for drug court participants also are shown to be less than those incarcerated. Available in 11 of the 12 judicial districts in the state, Nebraska offers 24 problem-solving courts, addressing the needs of adults, juveniles and families alike. Similarly, probation programs specializing in the management of adults and youth who sexually harm, use substances or engage in domestic violence, incorporate proven practices for risk-reduction and are yielding positive outcomes.

- Drug and Other Problem-Solving Courts
- Probation Services
- Community-Based Programs and Field Services

GOAL 4: BEING ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PUBLIC

The Judicial Branch, like the Executive and Legislative Branches of government, must be accountable to the public. This goal focuses on the obligation of courts and probation to ensure that staff at all levels are competent, professional, fiscally responsible, and customer service oriented; to establish standards by which court and probation operations and performance can be measured; to keep all branches of government and the public informed of Judicial Branch operations, programs, and initiatives; and to develop a clear strategic agenda that fosters public trust and confidence. Confidence in our judges is at the heart of maintaining the public's trust in the Judicial Branch. Allegations of misconduct must be investigated and resolved timely and fairly.

- Customer Service Oriented Workforce
- Performance Standards for the Judicial Branch
- Financial Accountability
- Professional Ethics and Conduct Codes
- Efficient Business Practices



GOAL 5: STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION WITH CITIZENS & WITHIN GOVERNMENT



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While the Judicial Branch is a branch of government independent from the Executive and Legislative Branches, it does not exist in isolation. Courts exist to serve the public and cannot serve effectively if meaningful communication between the branches, within the branch, and with the public does not take place. This goal focuses on enhancing Judicial Branch communication with the Executive and Legislative Branches of state government, with all other levels of government, with the public, and with other courts.

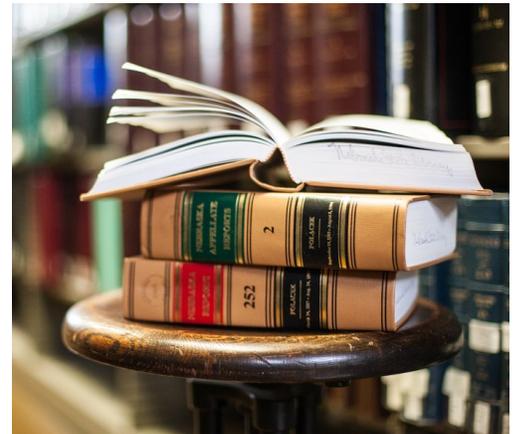
The Judicial Branch also should foster public understanding of the role of the branch and how it functions through community outreach and education programs. The Judicial Branch should provide information regarding the duties of a judge, the jury system, and the merit selection process. The court system should strive to share information with the public while safeguarding private information of court participants including victims of crimes.

External Communications

- Executive and the Legislative Branches
- Local Governmental Groups, Specifically County Governmental Organizations
- Programs and Initiatives for Public Understanding of the Judicial Branch

Internal Communications

- Coordination between the Chief Justice and the Presiding Judges
- Open Communication of Information between Court and Probation Administration and Statewide Judicial Branch Staff



GOAL 6: REGULATING THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The Judicial Branch has long recognized the indispensable role of the legal profession in protecting individual rights and liberties in a free society. We continue in that tradition. Because the Nebraska Supreme Court regulates the practice of law, the Court must determine how the legal profession can best serve the public. This strategic goal requires ongoing oversight of the attorney admissions process, disciplinary systems, and the unauthorized practice of law. Through the Court's Attorney Services Division, the Judicial Branch oversees the licensure of attorneys and the requirements of the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) rule.

- Attorney Admissions Process
- Annual Licensure of Attorneys
- Counsel for Discipline
- Mandatory Continuing Legal Education
- Rules of Practice in Appellate and Trial Courts
- Unauthorized Practice of Law



Nebraska Supreme Court in the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska



“... Nebraska’s Judicial Branch is growing, it’s dynamic, and it’s busy. Our dedicated judges, support staff, and probation employees are carrying out the Court’s long-term mission to do justice, resolve disputes, provide equal protection to all citizens, and ensure due process of law in all 93 of Nebraska’s counties.

The Supreme Court is very proud of the many accomplishments of our court family in the last year. We truly appreciate the support the Legislature has provided to the judiciary and we look forward to working with you in serving Nebraska’s citizens in the coming year.”

*Chief Justice Mike Heavican,
State of the Judiciary Address
January 2014*

The Nebraska Supreme Court wishes to acknowledge and thank the following Committees for integral participation in planning for the future of the Judicial Branch of Government:

Chief Justice’s Leadership Committee
Supreme Court

Chief Justice Michael G. Heavican and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court

Court of Appeals
Chief Judge Frankie J. Moore

Workers’ Compensation Court
Presiding Judge Laureen K. Van Norman and Court Administrator Glenn W. Morton, Jr.

Nebraska District Judges' Association
President Peter C. Bataillon, President-Elect James E. Doyle IV,
Immediate Past President Steven D. Burns,
Legislative Committee Co-Chairs Gary B. Randall and Robert R. Otte

Nebraska County Judges' Association
President Kurt T. Rager, Vice-President Anne M. Paine,
Immediate Past President Laurie J. Yardley,
Legislative Committee Co-Chairs Marcena M. Hendrix and
Patrick R. McDermott

Separate Juvenile Court Judges’ Association
President Douglas F. Johnson, Immediate Past President Robert B. O’Neal,
Legislative Committee Chair Lawrence D. Gendler

Presiding Judge Representatives
Leo P. Dobrovolny, District Court; Curtis L. Maschman, County Court;
Linda S. Porter, Separate Juvenile Court

Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation
Corey R. Steel, State Court Administrator
Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, Probation Administrator
Staff of the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation

Supreme Court Project Committees
Case Management
Curtis L. Maschman, County Court; Patricia A. Lamberty, Retired, District Court

Guardianship/Conservatorship
Francie C. Riedmann, Court of Appeals; Susan M. Bazis, County Court

Children/Commission on Children in the Courts
Everett O. Inbody, Court of Appeals; Douglas F. Johnson, Separate Juvenile Court

Children/Through the Eyes of Child Initiative
Lawrence D. Gendler, Separate Juvenile Court

Supreme Court Project Committees (continued)

Probation Evidence-Based Practices Committee

Jodi Nelson, District Court

Problem-Solving/Drug Court Committee

James E. Doyle IV, District Court

Technology Committee

William B. Cassel, Supreme Court

Interpreter Advisory Committee

William B. Cassel, Supreme Court

Minority Justice Committee

John F. Irwin, Court of Appeals

Pro Se Advisory Implementation Committee

Frankie J. Moore

Media/Community Outreach PEOPLE

Todd J. Hutton, County Court

Dispute Resolution/Parenting Act Committee

Michael W. Pirtle, Court of Appeals

Judicial Branch Education Committee

Michael W. Pirtle, Court of Appeals

Mandatory Continuing Legal Education

Kenneth C. Stephan, Supreme Court

**Nebraska Court System Reengineering
Committee Advisory Group**

Patrick R. McDermott, County Court, Chairman

Linda S. Porter, Separate Juvenile Court, Policy Committee

Thomas M. Maul, Lawyer, Policy Committee

Sally R. Johnson, Lawyer, Policy Committee

Liz Neeley, Consultant, Policy Committee

Lawrence D. Gendler, Separate Juvenile Court, Structure Committee

Paul W. Korslund, District Court, Structure Committee

Gary B. Randall, District Court, Centralization Committee

Thomas A. Otepka, District Court, Centralization Committee

Anne M. Paine, County Court, Centralization Committee

National Center for State Courts, Staff to the Advisory Group

Nebraska Supreme Court

Office of the State Court Administrator

Nebraska State Capitol
1445 K Street, Room 1213
P.O. Box 98910
Lincoln, NE 68509

Phone: 402-471-3730
Fax: 402-471-2197
www.supremecourt.ne.gov

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