

July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2019

Nebraska Supreme Court Strategic Agenda



Photo credit: Bobbi and Steve Olson

NEBRASKA JUDICIAL BRANCH STRATEGIC AGENDA 2017-2019

The Nebraska Judicial Branch continues its six overarching goals for the 2017-2019 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 Litigation
- Limited English-Speaking Litigants and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Courthouse Accessibility, Security, and Continuity of Operations
- Judicial Branch Education

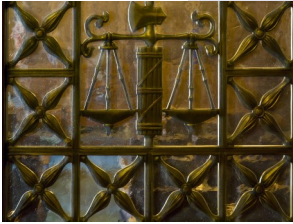
GOAL 2: PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

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 rehabilitative 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 has been realized through 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.

- Nebraska Court Improvement Project
- Children and Families in Domestic Relations Cases
- Juvenile Justice Initiatives
- Adoption and Termination of Parental Rights
- Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Adults
- Office of the Public Guardian
- Child Welfare and Juvenile Restorative Conferencing



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 courts, the veterans court pilot project, and other problem-solving courts results in a significant cost savings to the courts and the state. Recidivism rates for drug court participants are less than rates of incarcerated individuals. In addition, specialized probation programs incorporating proven risk reduction practices continue to yield positive outcomes in the management of adults and youth who sexually harm, use substances, or engage in domestic violence behavior.

- Drug, Veterans, and Other Problem-Solving Courts
- Adult and Juvenile Probation Supervision
- Community-Based Programs and Services

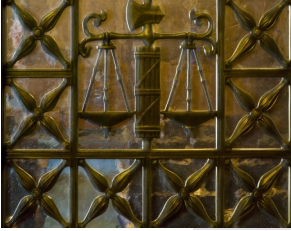
GOAL 4: BEING ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PUBLIC

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. It is vital that judges and all Judicial Branch employees are provided ongoing quality education. Allegations of misconduct must be investigated and resolved timely and fairly.

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



GOAL 5: STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION WITH CITIZENS & WITHIN GOVERNMENT



A more detailed Strategic Plan for the Nebraska Supreme Court Committee on Self-Represented Litigation Strategic Agenda is available on the Judicial Branch Web site: www.supremecourt.ne.gov

While the Judicial Branch is 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 for transparency and to share information with the public while safeguarding private information of court participants, including victims of crimes.

External Communications

- Executive and Legislative Branches
- Local Governmental Groups, Specifically County Governmental Organizations
- Educational and Media Programs
- Initiatives for Public Understanding of the Judicial Branch
- Access Through Audio/Video Capabilities

Internal Communications

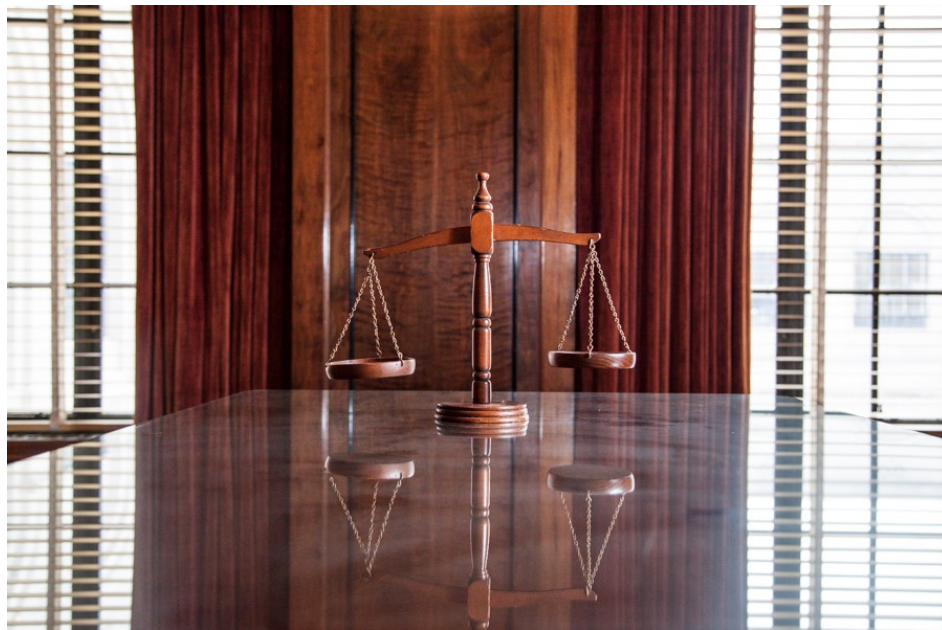
- Coordination Between the Chief Justice and the Presiding Judges
- Open Communication of Information Between Court and Probation Administration and Statewide Judicial Branch Staff



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 admission 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
- Guardian ad Litem Training





“...I am proud of the work the Judicial Branch does to ensure that our State motto has meaning ... the mission of Nebraska’s Judicial Branch is to provide the citizens of this great State with an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice under the law.”

“We work to provide access to justice for all Nebraskans and to be certain that in Nebraska there is ‘Equality Before the Law.’”

“It is our honor to work with the Legislature to accomplish that goal.”

*Chief Justice Mike Heavican,
State of the Judiciary Address
January 2016*

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
John F. Wright
Lindsey Miller-Lerman
William B. Cassel
Stephanie F. Stacy
Max J. Kelch
Jeffrey J. Funke

Court of Appeals

Chief Judge Frankie J. Moore
John F. Irwin
Everett O. Inbody
Michael W. Pirtle
Francie C. Riedmann
Riko E. Bishop

Nebraska District Judges' Association

Members of the Executive Committee

Nebraska County Judges' Association

Members of the Executive Committee

Nebraska Separate Juvenile Court Judges' Association

Members of the Executive Committee

Workers' Compensation Court

Current Presiding Judge

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

Children in the Courts Commission

Everett O. Inbody, Court of Appeals
Douglas F. Johnson, Separate Juvenile Court

Dispute Resolution Advisory Council

Michael W. Pirtle, Court of Appeals

Committee on Guardianships and Conservatorships

Francie C. Riedmann, Court of Appeals
Susan M. Bazis, County Court

Interpreter Advisory Committee

William B. Cassel, Supreme Court

Judicial Branch Education Advisory Committee

Jeffrey J. Funke, Supreme Court
Riko E. Bishop, Court of Appeals

Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Committee

Stephanie Stacy, Supreme Court

Minority Justice Committee

John F. Irwin, Court of Appeals

Probation Services Committee

Jodi Nelson, District Court

Problem-Solving Courts Committee

James E. Doyle IV, District Court

**Public Education Outreach Promoting Law & Equity Media
Committee**

Jeffrey J. Funke, Supreme Court
Todd J. Hutton, County Court

Self-Represented Litigation Committee

Frankie J. Moore, Court of Appeals

Technology Committee

William B. Cassel, Supreme Court

Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative

Lawrence D. Gendler, Separate Juvenile Court

Nebraska Supreme Court

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