



1971- 2021

NCSC'S ANNIVERSARY: 50 YEARS AND TRENDING

When Chief Justice Warren Burger called for the creation of "a national center for state courts" at the first National Conference of the Judiciary in 1971, it is safe to assume that no one in attendance knew what form such a "center" would take. But they did know that it was to serve as a "central resource" to improve the operations of state courts—and that establishing such an organization to serve all the courts of the states and territories required "imagination and daring."

Later that year, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) began operations in the headquarters building of the Federal Judicial Center in Washington, D.C. The idea was for NCSC to act as an "information clearinghouse" through which data and innovations from one state court could be used to benefit all state courts.

Initially, NCSC's work was largely devoted to reducing court case backlogs and delay. This task was complicated due to inconsistencies in data from the state courts. For instance, what constitutes a "criminal case"? Does it begin at the time of arrest? At the first hearing? There was no consensus, as courts counted cases differently.

NCSC built on its initial work with the publication of *Justice Delayed: The Pace of Litigation in Urban Trial Courts*, and the establishment of the Court Statistics Project. This was in 1978, the same year that NCSC's headquarters building opened in Williamsburg, Virginia, next to the William & Mary Law School. In 1979 NCSC created its Knowledge and Information Services (KIS), marshaling the largest collection of court-administration-related materials in the world—the NCSC Library. That library flourishes to this day.



Members of the Conference of Chief Justices gathered in Denver in 1971, discussing, among many things, the formation of the National Center for State Courts

It took a diverse staff representing numerous disciplines, such as statistics, public administration, law, and adult education, to use NCSC's acquired data and knowledge to help courts improve their operations. The organization went beyond its information-clearinghouse mission to perform original research and provide direct technical assistance to the states. This has led to improvements in caseload management, jury systems, and the adaptation of technology to court operations, to name just a few areas.

While NCSC's work to improve the operations of courts continues, it encompasses much more. Court leadership at all levels is improved via NCSC's work with national and international court associations, as well as through the education provided by the Institute for Court Management (ICM). NCSC also plays a role in how courts confront social problems, such as domestic violence and drug abuse, through support for specialty courts.

It is interesting to look at the evolution of NCSC through the lens of the annual *Trends in State Courts* report. The original "Report on Trends in State Courts" was published in June 1988 at the request of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA). It started as a photocopied typescript, which featured one topic per page and a brief list of sources. Many of the topics in the 1988 report are still relevant in *Trends 2021*, although they have taken on a different form. For example:

1988	"Alternative Dispute Resolution"	"CCTV in Courts"	"Court Specialization"	"Discrimination in the Courts"
2004	"Reaching Out to Self-Represented Litigants Through Virtual Reference and Education"	"Web Logs: Increasing Courts' Abilities to Quickly Communicate with Constituents"	"Therapeutic Jurisprudence: It's Not just for Problem-Solving Courts and Calendars Anymore"	"The Growing Need for Qualified Court Interpreters"
2021	"Usability and Court Dispute Resolution Platforms" (from ADR to self-help to ODR, or "online dispute resolution")	"COVID-19, Zoom, and the Future of Appellate Oral Argument" (from closed-circuit TV to blogs to Zoom and videoconferencing platforms)	"Pathways through the Pandemic: An Application of Family Justice Pathways in Three Courts" (from a general look at specialized courts to application to therapeutic justice principles to special courts in operation)	"A Court System's Guide to Increasing Diversity and Fostering Inclusion" (from problems of fairness in court processes to language access to community outreach)

This selection of articles from *Trends* 1988, 2004, and 2021 illustrate a shift in the work of NCSC from collecting case data to improving internal court processes to improving courts' relationships with the communities they serve. This work continues with issues such as confronting implicit bias; protecting public health, while still hearing cases, during the pandemic; and improving the physical and online security of the courts.

NCSC was fostered by the vision and determination of court leadership 50 years ago. It will continue to work with courts at all levels to improve access to justice for all and protect the rule of law.

A LOOK BACK



1971

Members of the Conference of Chief Justices gathered in Denver, discussing, among many things, the formation of the National Center for State Courts.

1977

Ed McConnell, NCSC's first president, proudly stands at the future site of NCSC headquarters in Williamsburg, Va.



1982

Linda Caviness became the first woman to serve on NCSC's management team (pictured here in 1987). Front row: Jim James, Ed McConnell, Keith Bumstead. Second row: Geoff Gallas, Harvey Solomon, Caviness, David Steelman, Alex Aikman.



1983

Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor attends the annual National Association of Women Judges conference.

1988

Chief Justice of the United States William H. Rehnquist, center, with William Spong Jr., a U.S. Senator from Virginia and former dean of William & Mary's Law School, and then-Chief Justice of Alabama C.C. Torbert, Jr. at the annual CCJ/COSCA meeting.



2005

The William H. Rehnquist Award presentation at the U.S. Supreme Court, with California Judge Len Edwards (center) receiving the award. Left, William Vickery, then-California state court administrator and Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, retired.



2009

The first women judges from Egypt visit the United States as part of an NCSC program.



2010

President Mary McQueen, former NCSC President Roger Warren, and then-Texas Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson.



2014

Judge Jennifer Bailey of Dade County, Florida, and Sheri Carter of Los Angeles Superior Court, Central District, participate in one of the first meetings of CCJ's Civil Justice Initiative meetings in Arlington, Va.

2015

Chief Justice of the United States John G. Roberts, Jr. addresses guests of NCSC's annual William H. Rehnquist Award dinner.

